

# THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1888.

## THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

### CHAPTER XIX.

ANNABEL.

MOST men have their romance in life sooner or later. Mine had come in due course, and she who made it for me was Annabel Brightman.

After my first meeting with her, when she was a child of fourteen, and I not much more than a lad of twenty, I had continued to see her from time to time, for Mr. Brightman's first invitation to me was but the prelude to others. I watched her grow up into a good, unaffected woman, lovable and charming as she was when a child. Childhood had passed away now, and thought and gentleness had taken its place; and to my eyes and my heart no other girl in the world could compare with Annabel Brightman.

Her father suspected it. Had he lived only a little longer he would have learned it beyond doubt, for I should have spoken out more fully upon the matter.

A little less than a year before his death—it was on a Good Friday—I was spending the day at his house, and was in the garden with Annabel. She had taken my arm, and we were pacing the broad walk to the left of the lawn, thinking only of ourselves, when raising my eyes I saw Mr. Brightman looking attentively at us from one of the French windows. He beckoned to me, and I went in.

"Charles," said he, when I had stepped inside, "no nonsense. You and Annabel are too young for anything of that sort."

I felt that his eyes were full upon me as I stood before him, and my face flushed to the roots of my hair. But I took courage to ask a question.

"Sir, every year passing over our heads will lessen that objection. Would there be any other?"

"Be quiet, Charles. Time enough to talk of these things when the years shall have passed. You are too young for them, I say."

"I am twenty-five, sir; and Miss Brightman——"

"Twenty-five?" he interrupted. "I was past forty when I thought of marriage. You must not turn Annabel's head with visions of what the years may bring forth, for if you do I will not have you here. Leave that to the future."

But there was sufficient in Mr. Brightman's manner to prove that he had not been blind to the attachment springing up between us; and undoubtedly regarded me as the possible future husband of his daughter. At any rate he continued to invite me to his house. During the past year Annabel had been a great deal at Hastings with Miss Brightman; I wondered that her father and mother would spare her so much.

But Annabel knew nothing of that conversation, and I had never yet spoken of love to her. And now Mr. Brightman, who would, or at least might, have sanctioned it, was gone; and Mrs. Brightman, who would certainly, as I believed, oppose it, remained.

In the days immediately following Mr. Brightman's death, I was literally overwhelmed with business. Apart from the additional work that naturally fell upon me—his share as well as mine—no end of clients came pouring in; and for no earthly purpose, that I could see, excepting curiosity. Besides this, there was the frightful search for Sir Ralph Clavering's will, and the anxiety its loss entailed on me.

On the Wednesday afternoon, just as I had got rid of two clients, Lennard came up with the news that someone else was there. I was then in the front room, seated at Mr. Brightman's desk. Too impatient to hear Lennard out, I told him I could see no one; could not, and would not.

"It is Miss Annabel Brightman," rejoined Lennard quietly.

"Miss Annabel Brightman? Oh, that's very different; I will see her."

Annabel came in, throwing back her crape veil. She had driven up alone in the carriage to bring me a message from her mother. Mrs. Brightman had made an appointment with me for that evening at her house; she had now sent to tell me not to keep it, as she was not well enough to attend to business.

"Mamma wishes you to come to-morrow instead of to-day; early in the afternoon," added Annabel.

That would be impossible, and I said so; my engagements would not at present permit me to give up an afternoon.

"Perhaps to-morrow evening will do," I suggested. "In fact it must do, Annabel. I don't know when I shall have leisure to come down to you in the daytime."

"I daresay it will do," assented Annabel. "At any rate, you can come to us. If mamma is not able to enter into business matters, another time can be appointed."

"Is your mamma so very ill?"

"Sometimes I think so—but she fluctuates," replied Annabel.

"She is extremely weak, and her spirits are depressed. She will pass whole hours shut up in her room in solitude. When I ask to go in, Hatch brings out a message that mamma is not able to see even me."

"Her illness must be on the nerves."

"I suppose so. Yesterday she came down and walked with me in the garden in the sunshine. She seemed pretty well then, but not strong. In the evening she shut herself up again."

"I wish you would sit down, Annabel," I said, offering her a chair for the third time.

"I would if I could stay. Mamma charged me to go straight back after leaving the message with you.—Are you well?" she continued with hesitation. "You look harassed."

"I am well, Annabel. But you have used the right word—I am harassed; terribly so."

"Poor papa!" she sighed. "It has brought a world of work and care upon you, as well as of grief to us."

"I should not mind work. But—we have had another loss, Annabel. A loss as mysterious as that of the gold; and far more important."

"What is it?" she asked. "More money?"

"No; I wish it were. A will, deposited in the safe there, has disappeared. I cannot even guess at the consequences; ruin probably to me, and to one of our best clients. Not only that. If things are to vanish so unaccountably from our strongholds, we must have an enemy at work, and it is impossible to foresee where it may end."

"How very strange! What was the will like? I mean what did it look like? I have a reason for asking you."

"It was a folded parchment. You saw your father's will, Annabel: it looked very much like that. Why do you ask?"

"Because I remember papa's bringing home a parchment, exactly like the one you describe. It was an evening or two before he died: the evening before I and mamma went to Hastings. We left on Saturday, so it must have been Friday. Do you think it could be the missing will?"

"Oh, no. I have known Mr. Brightman—though very rarely—take home deeds which required studying; but he was not likely to take home Sir Ralph Clavering's will. He made it himself, and knew every word it contained. Annabel, I did not intend to let out the name, but it will be safe with you."

"Perfectly so; as safe as with yourself. I will not repeat it, even to mamma."

"And what I shall do I cannot tell," I concluded, as I attended her down to the carriage. "I would give every shilling I possess to find it."

More work, and then the afternoon came to an end, my dinner came up, and I was at liberty to enjoy a little rest. I had taken to

the front room as my sitting-room, and should speedily remove the desk and iron safe into the other, making that exclusively a business room, and seeing clients in it. After dinner, the fire clear, my reading-lamp lighted, I took up the newspaper. But for habits of order and self-denying rules, I should never have attained to the position I enjoyed. One of those rules was, never to read the *Times* or any work of relaxation until my work was over for the day. I could then enjoy my paper and my cigar, and feel that I had earned both.

I took up the *Times*, and almost the very first paragraph my eye fell upon was the following :

"We hear that the convict ship *Vengeance*, after encountering stormy weather and contrary winds on her passage out, has been wrecked upon an uninhabited island. It is said that some of the convicts have escaped."

I started up almost as if I had been shot. Tom Heriot had gone out in the *Vengeance* : was he one of those who had escaped ? If so, where was he ? and what would be his ultimate fate ?

The ship had sailed from our shores in August ; this was February : therefore the reader may think that the news had been long enough in reaching England. But it must be remembered that sailing vessels were at the mercy of the winds and waves, and in those days telegrams and cablegrams had not been invented.

Throwing my cigar into the fire and the newspaper on the table, I fell into an unpleasant reverie. My lucky star did not seem in the ascendant just now. Mr. Brightman's unhappy death ; this fresh uncertainty about Tom Heriot ; the certain loss of the gold and the disappearance of the will —

A ring at the visitors' bell aroused me. I listened, as Leah opened the door, curious to know who could be coming after office hours, unless it was Sir Edmund Clavering. Lake was in the country.

"Is Mr. Strange in, Leah ?" And the sound of the sweet voice set my heart beating.

"Yes, Miss Brightman. Please go up."

A light foot on the stairs, and Annabel entered, holding up a parchment with its endorsement towards me. "Will of Sir Ralph Clavering."

"Oh, Annabel ! you are my guardian angel !"

I seized the deed and her hands together. She smiled, and drew away the latter.

"I still thought the parchment I spoke of might be the missing one," she explained, "and when I got home I looked in papa's secretaire. There it was."

"And you have come back to bring it to me !"

"Of course I have. It would have been cruel to let you pass another night of suspense. I came as soon as I had dined."

"Who is with you ?"



"No one; I came in by the omnibus. In two omnibuses really, for the first one only brought me as far as Charing Cross."

"You came in by omnibus! And alone?"

"Why not? Who was to know me, or what could harm me? I kept my veil down. I would not order the carriage out again. It might have disturbed mamma, and she is in bed with one of her worst headaches. And now, Charles, I must hasten back again."

"Wait one moment, Annabel, whilst I lock up this doubly-precious will."

"Why? You are not going to trouble yourself to accompany me, when you are so busy? It is not in the least necessary. I shall return home just as safely as I came here."

"You silly child! That you have come here at night and alone, I cannot help; but what would Mrs. Brightman say to me if I suffered you to go back in the same manner?"

"I suppose it was not quite right," she returned, laughingly; "but I only thought of the pleasure of restoring the will."

I locked it up in the safe, and went downstairs with her. Why Mr. Brightman should have taken the will home puzzled me considerably; but the relief to my mind was inexpressible, and I felt quite a gush of remorse towards Lady Clavering for having unjustly suspected her.

The prosy old omnibus, as it sped on its way to Clapham, was to me as an Elysian chariot. And we had it to ourselves the whole way, but never a word passed between us that might not have been spoken before a committee of dowagers. In fact, we talked chiefly of Miss Brightman. I began it by asking how she was.

"Aunt Lucy is very delicate indeed" replied Annabel. "Papa's death has tried her greatly: and anything that tries her at once affects her chest. She says she shall not be able to risk another winter in England, even at Hastings."

"Where would she go?"

"To Madeira. At least, she thinks so now. In a letter mamma received from her yesterday, Aunt Lucy said she should go there in the autumn."

"She will find it very dull and lonely—all by herself."

"Yes," sighed Annabel. "Mamma said she should send me with her. But of course I could not go—and leave mamma. I wish I had a sister! One of us might then accompany Aunt Lucy, and the other remain at home. What do you think that stupid Hatch said?" cried Annabel, running on. "We were talking about it at lunch, and Hatch was in the room. 'It's just the best thing you can do, Miss Annabel, to go with your aunt,' she declared, following up mamma's remark."

"Perhaps Mrs. Brightman may take it into her head to go to Madeira also?"

Annabel made a movement of dissent. "No, I don't think she

would do that, Charles. She and Aunt Lucy used to be the very best of friends, but lately there has been some coolness between them. The reason is not known to me, but I fancy Hatch knows it."

"Hatch seems to be quite a confidential attendant on your mamma."

"Oh, yes, she is so. She has lived with us so long, you see; and mamma, when she was Miss Chantry, knew Hatch when she was quite a child. They both come from the same place—near Malvern, in Worcestershire. Aunt Lucy and mamma were intimate in early days, and it was through that intimacy that papa first knew Miss Chantry. Why she and Aunt Lucy should have grown cool to one another now, I cannot tell; but they have done so—and oh, I am sorry for it. I love Aunt Lucy very, very much," added the girl, enthusiastically.

"And I'm sure I love the name—Lucy," I said, laughing. "It was my mother's."

The evening was yet early when we reached Mrs. Brightman's, for eight o'clock was striking. Hatch, in her new mourning, came stealing down the stairs with a quiet footfall, her black cap-strings flying as usual.

"Why, Miss Annabel, where have you been?" she cried. "I couldn't *imagine* what had become of you."

"I had to go out, Hatch—to take a deed to the office that poor papa had brought home and left here. Why? Has mamma wanted me?"

"Not she," returned Hatch. "She has just dropped off into a doze, and I am trying to keep the house free from noise. I thought you had been spirited away, Miss Annabel, and that's the truth."

"Mrs. Brightman has one of her bad headaches?" I remarked.

Hatch looked at me; then quickly at her young mistress: as much as to say: "You've been telling him that, Miss Annabel."

"It is that bad to-night, Mr. Charles, that her temples is fit to split," she answered. "Since master's death she have had 'em a'most constant—and no wonder, with all the worry and the shock it brought her. Are you going already, sir?"

"Will you not stay for tea?" asked Annabel.

"Not to-night, thank you," I replied.

"I'll let you out quietly," said Hatch, advancing towards the hall door. "And mind, Miss Annabel, you are not to go anigh your mamma's room to waken her," she added, looking back dictatorially. "When one is racked with pain, body and mind, sleep is more precious than gold."

Hatch had lived there during the whole of Annabel's life, and could not always lay aside the authoritative manner she had exercised towards the child; possibly did not try to do so.

Great sway was held by Hatch in the household, and Mrs. Brightman appeared to sanction it. Certainly she never in any way inter-

fered with it. But Hatch, always kindly, was a favourite with the servants.

With her shrewdness, capability and strong sense, it seemed a marvel that she should not have improved in manners and in her way of speaking. But she remained very much the same rough diamond that she had always been. Strangers were wont to feel surprise that Mrs. Brightman, herself so refined a woman, should put up with Hatch as her personal attendant; and in her attacks of illness Hatch would be in her mistress's room for hours together. At this time I knew nothing of Hatch's antecedents, very little of Mrs. Brightman's; or of matters relating to the past; and when circumstances brought me into Hatch's confidence, she enlightened me upon some points of the family history. A few of her communications I cannot do better than insert here, improving somewhat upon her parts of speech.

I recall the scene now. It was a lovely moonlit evening, not long after the time of which I am writing. I had gone to Clapham to inquire after Mrs. Brightman, who was then seriously ill, and kept her chamber. Strolling about the garden in the soft twilight, wishing Annabel was at home instead of at Hastings, Hatch came out and joined me, and at once fell to chatting without ceremony. I made a remark, quite by chance, that touched upon the subject of Mrs. Brightman's early life; it was immediately taken up by Hatch and enlarged upon. I heard much to which I had hitherto been a stranger.

"Colonel Chantry and his wife, who was the daughter of Lord Onyx, lived at their seat, Chantry Hall, a beautiful place not far from Malvern in Worcestershire. They had three children—George, Frederic and Emma, who were reared in all the pride and pomp of the Chantry family. The property was strictly entailed. It would descend to George Chantry at his father's death; and as Colonel Chantry had no other property whatever, and as he lived not only up to his income but beyond it, the future look-out for the younger son and the daughter was not a very great one.

"Such a dash they kept up," said Hatch, warming with her subject. "The Colonel liked show and parade, and Madam, as we always called her, had been born to it. She was the Honourable Mrs. Chantry, you see, sir, and chose to live according. They visited all the noble families round about, and were visited back again. The Somers' at Eastnor Castle, the Lyons' at Maddresfield, the Foleys at Whitley, the other Foleys at Stoke Edith, the Coventrys over at Croome, the Lechmeres at the Rhydd, the Hornyholds at Blacknore Park, and the Parkingtons at Ombersley—but there'd be no end if I stopped to tell you the half of 'em. Besides that, Mrs. Chantry counted a near relative in one of the cathedral prebendaries at Worcester—and for pride and exclusiveness some of those old prebendaries capped the world. So that——"

"But, Hatch, why are you telling me this?" I interrupted.

would do that, Charles. She and Aunt Lucy used to be the very best of friends, but lately there has been some coolness between them. The reason is not known to me, but I fancy Hatch knows it."

"Hatch seems to be quite a confidential attendant on your mamma."

"Oh, yes, she is so. She has lived with us so long, you see; and mamma, when she was Miss Chantry, knew Hatch when she was quite a child. They both come from the same place—near Malvern, in Worcestershire. Aunt Lucy and mamma were intimate in early days, and it was through that intimacy that papa first knew Miss Chantry. Why she and Aunt Lucy should have grown cool to one another now, I cannot tell; but they have done so—and oh, I am sorry for it. I love Aunt Lucy very, very much," added the girl, enthusiastically.

"And I'm sure I love the name—Lucy," I said, laughing. "It was my mother's."

The evening was yet early when we reached Mrs. Brightman's, for eight o'clock was striking. Hatch, in her new mourning, came stealing down the stairs with a quiet footfall, her black cap-strings flying as usual.

"Why, Miss Annabel, where have you been?" she cried. "I couldn't *imagine* what had become of you."

"I had to go out, Hatch—to take a deed to the office that poor papa had brought home and left here. Why? Has mamma wanted me?"

"Not she," returned Hatch. "She has just dropped off into a doze, and I am trying to keep the house free from noise. I thought you had been spirited away, Miss Annabel, and that's the truth."

"Mrs. Brightman has one of her bad headaches?" I remarked.

Hatch looked at me; then quickly at her young mistress: as much as to say: "You've been telling him that, Miss Annabel."

"It is that bad to-night, Mr. Charles, that her temples is fit to split," she answered. "Since master's death she have had 'em a'most constant—and no wonder, with all the worry and the shock it brought her. Are you going already, sir?"

"Will you not stay for tea?" asked Annabel.

"Not to-night, thank you," I replied.

"I'll let you out quietly," said Hatch, advancing towards the hall door. "And mind, Miss Annabel, you are not to go anigh your mamma's room to waken her," she added, looking back dictatorially. "When one is racked with pain, body and mind, sleep is more precious than gold."

Hatch had lived there during the whole of Annabel's life, and could not always lay aside the authoritative manner she had exercised towards the child; possibly did not try to do so.

Great sway was held by Hatch in the household, and Mrs. Brightman appeared to sanction it. Certainly she never in any way inter-

fered with it. But Hatch, always kindly, was a favourite with the servants.

With her shrewdness, capability and strong sense, it seemed a marvel that she should not have improved in manners and in her way of speaking. But she remained very much the same rough diamond that she had always been. Strangers were wont to feel surprise that Mrs. Brightman, herself so refined a woman, should put up with Hatch as her personal attendant; and in her attacks of illness Hatch would be in her mistress's room for hours together. At this time I knew nothing of Hatch's antecedents, very little of Mrs. Brightman's; or of matters relating to the past; and when circumstances brought me into Hatch's confidence, she enlightened me upon some points of the family history. A few of her communications I cannot do better than insert here, improving somewhat upon her parts of speech.

I recall the scene now. It was a lovely moonlit evening, not long after the time of which I am writing. I had gone to Clapham to inquire after Mrs. Brightman, who was then seriously ill, and kept her chamber. Strolling about the garden in the soft twilight, wishing Annabel was at home instead of at Hastings, Hatch came out and joined me, and at once fell to chatting without ceremony. I made a remark, quite by chance, that touched upon the subject of Mrs. Brightman's early life; it was immediately taken up by Hatch and enlarged upon. I heard much to which I had hitherto been a stranger.

"Colonel Chantry and his wife, who was the daughter of Lord Onyx, lived at their seat, Chantry Hall, a beautiful place not far from Malvern in Worcestershire. They had three children—George, Frederic and Emma, who were reared in all the pride and pomp of the Chantry family. The property was strictly entailed. It would descend to George Chantry at his father's death; and as Colonel Chantry had no other property whatever, and as he lived not only up to his income but beyond it, the future look-out for the younger son and the daughter was not a very great one.

"Such a dash they kept up," said Hatch, warming with her subject. "The Colonel liked show and parade, and Madam, as we always called her, had been born to it. She was the Honourable Mrs. Chantry, you see, sir, and chose to live according. They visited all the noble families round about, and were visited back again. The Somers' at Eastnor Castle, the Lyons' at Maddresfield, the Foleys at Whitley, the other Foleys at Stoke Edith, the Coventrys over at Croome, the Lechmeres at the Rhydd, the Hornyholds at Blacknore Park, and the Parkingtons at Ombersley—but there'd be no end if I stopped to tell you the half of 'em. Besides that, Mrs. Chantry counted a near relative in one of the cathedral prebendaries at Worcester—and for pride and exclusiveness some of those old prebendaries capped the world. So that——"

"But, Hatch, why are you telling me this?" I interrupted.

"To give you a notion of what my mistress was accustomed to when she was Miss Emma Chantry," promptly replied Hatch. "Well, Mr. Charles, they grew up, those three children, and I watched 'em grow; not that I was as old as they were; and I looked upon 'em as the finest and grandest young people in the world. The two sons spent a good deal more than they ought. Mr. Frederic especially, and the Colonel had to find a lot o' money, for 'twas wanted on all sides, and folks wondered how he did it. The end to it came all on a sudden—death."

"Whose death?"

"The Colonel's, sir. Mr. George, who was then Captain Chantry, and about twenty-seven years old, took the estate. But it was frightfully encumbered, and he complained bitterly to his mother that he should be a poor man for years and years to come. Madam resented what he said, and a quarrel ensued. She would not remain at the Hall, as he had expected her to do, but took a cottage at Malvern, and went into it with her daughter, with a parade of humility. She did not live very long after that, and Miss Emma was thrown on the world. Captain Chantry was married, then, to an earl's daughter; but his wife and Miss Emma did not get on together. Miss Emma refused to make her home at the Hall with Lady Grace, and she came to London on a visit to Miss Lucy Brightman, whose mother was living there. She and Miss Lucy had been at a finishing school together years before, and they had kept up their friendship. It was there she first saw Mr. Brightman, who was a great many years older than his sister; and it ended in their being married."

"And you came into their service, I suppose, Hatch?"

"I did, sir. They had been married near upon twelve months when young Mrs. Brightman found occasion to discharge two or three of her servants: and she wrote to the late housekeeper at Chantry Hall, asking her to find her some from our neighbourhood. London servants were *frightful*, she said: fine, lazy, extravagant and insolent. Mother heard about it, and spoke for me to go as under housemaid. Well, I was engaged, Mr. Charles, and I came up here to Clapham: and I was called 'Hatch' from the beginning, because my christian name, Emma, was the same as my lady's. Soon after that, Miss Annabel was born. It was my duty to wait upon the nurse and the sick-room; and my lady—who was ill and weakly for a long while—grew to like to have me there. She would talk about the old place to me, for you see I knew all the people in it as well as she did. Next, she made me upper housemaid; and in a very few years, for she had found out how clever I was at dressmaking and with the needle generally, I became her maid."

"And you are in her confidence, Hatch?" I rejoined. "Deservedly so, I am sure."

"In a measure I am, Mr. Charles. A lady like my Missis, who never loses her pride day nor night, cannot descend to be over con-



fidential with an inferior. But I know she values me—and so did my poor master. I mayn't be polished, Mr. Charles, but I'd go through fire and water for them any day."

And I am sure she would have done so.

Well, this was a portion of what Hatch told me. But I must now go back to the night whose events were interrupted for the purpose of recording these details. Not that there is anything more to relate of the night in question. Leaving a message that I would call on Mrs. Brightman in good time the following evening, wishing Annabel good-night, and Hatch also, I returned home.

## CHAPTER XX.

### PERRY'S REVELATION.

"DEAR STRANGE,—Have you seen the news in to-day's paper? I have just caught sight of it. If the *Vengeance* has foundered, or whatever the mishap may be, and Tom Heriot should be one of the escaped prisoners, he will be sure to make his way home. Rely upon it he has not grown less reckless than he was, but probably has become more so. What trouble may not come of it? Do try and get at the particulars officially, as to whether there's truth in the report, or not; and let me know without delay.

"Very truly yours,

"LEVEL."

Letters from Paris and the Continent generally were then usually delivered about mid-day. I was talking with Lennard in the front office when this one arrived. The clerks had gone to dinner.

"Have you heard the rumour about the ship *Vengeance*, Lennard?" I asked, laying down Lord Level's letter.

"I read it yesterday," he answered.

"I wonder how I could learn whether there's any foundation for it?"

Before he could answer me, we were interrupted by Major Carlen. He was in his usual state of excitement; his face lengthened, his arms thrown about, and his everlasting blue cloak trailing about him. I slipped the letter into my desk.

"Here's a pretty go, Charles!" he exclaimed. "Have you heard of it yet? That convict ship's gone to the bottom, and Tom Heriot has escaped."

"You should not assert that so positively, Major Carlen," I remonstrated. "It is not certain that any of the men have escaped, I suppose. If they have, Tom Heriot may not be one of them."

"But they have escaped," stuttered the grey old man, plumping himself down on a stool, around which his cloak fell like so much drapery. "Five have got off, and Tom is one of them."

"How do you know that?"

"How do I know it? How could I tell you if I didn't know it? Half-an-hour ago I met Percival in Downing Street, and he told me."

What little hope had been left within me took wings and flew away. Percival was First Lord of the Admiralty. He would certainly know the truth.

"Government has had official news of it," went on the Major gloomily; "and with it a list of the fugitives."

"And Tom's name is amongst them?"

"Tom's name is amongst them."

There was a pause. Lennard had gone into the other room. Major Carlen rose, saying something about lunch waiting for him at his club.

"Mark you, Charles: if Tom takes it into that rattle-pate of his to worm his way back to these shores, there may be the devil to pay. I hope with all my heart Level won't hear of this. The disgrace has been a precious thorn to him from the first."

"Blanche knows nothing at all of the matter as yet. She thinks Tom is with his regiment in India. The last time I saw her in Paris, not long before Mr. Brightman's death, she asked me what could be the reason Tom did not write to her."

"Much better tell her, and get it over," spoke the Major. "I should, if I were Level. He is more careful of her than she deserves—silly chit!"

Major Carlen and his cloak swung out again, the clerks came back, and the day and its duties went on. I wrote to Lord Level; giving him the substance of what the Major had heard, and telling him that I thought there could be little fear of Tom Heriot's venturing back to England. He could never be so reckless as to risk the danger.

Dinner over, I started for Mrs. Brightman's, and was admitted by the butler; who told me, in answer to my inquiry, that his mistress had been ill all day and had not come down. Tea waited on the drawing-room table, but no one was in the room. Presently Annabel entered.

"I am sorry you should have had the trouble to come, when perhaps you could not spare the time," she said. "Mamma is not well enough to see you."

"I was not busy to-night, Annabel. Perry has just told me your mamma has not been down to day. Is her illness anything more than would be caused by these bad headaches? Do you fear anything serious?"

"Yes—no. I—I hope not."

Her voice and manner were excessively subdued, as if she could scarcely speak from fear of breaking down. She turned to the table, evidently to avoid my notice, and busied herself with the teacups.

"What is the matter, Annabel?"

"Nothing," she faintly answered, though her tears were even then falling. But I knew that some great trouble must be upon her.

"Is Mrs. Brightman vexed with you for having come up last night with that deed?"

"No; oh, no. I told mamma about it this morning, and she said I had done quite right to take it up, but that I ought to have gone in the carriage."

"What, then, is causing you this grief?"

"You cannot expect me to be in very good spirits as yet," she replied: which was a decided evasion. "There are times—when I feel—the loss——"

She fairly broke down, and, sinking into a chair, cried bitterly and without concealment. I waited until she had become calmer.

"Annabel, my dear, sorrow for your loss is not all that disturbs your peace to-night. What else is there?"

"It is true that I have had something to vex me," she admitted after a pause. "But I cannot tell you about it."

"It is a momentary trouble, I hope; one that will pass away——"

"It will never pass away," she interrupted, with another burst of emotion. "It will be a weight and a grief upon me as long as my life shall last. I almost wish I had died with my father, rather than have to live and bear it."

I took her hands in mine, and spoke deliberately. "If it be so serious a trouble as that, I must know it, Annabel."

"And if it were of a nature to be spoken of, you should know it. But it is not, and I can tell you nothing."

"Could you speak of it to your father, were he still living?"

"We should be compelled to speak of it, I fear. But——"

"Then, my dear, you can speak of it to me. From henceforth you must look upon me as in his place; your protector; your best friend: one who will share your cares, perhaps more closely than he could have done; who will strive to soothe them with a love that could not have been his. In a short time, Annabel, I shall ask you to give me the legal right to be and do this."

"It can never be," she replied, lifting her tearful eyes to mine.

I looked at her with an amused smile. I knew she loved me—and what other obstacle could exist? Mrs. Brightman might oppose it at first, but I did not despair of winning her over in the end.

"Not quite yet, I know," I answered her. "In a few months' time."

"Charles, you misunderstand me. I said it could never be. *Never.*"

"I certainly do not understand that. Had your father lived, it would have been; and I do not say this without reason for the assertion. I believe that he would have given you to me, Annabel, heartily, with all his good will."

"Yes, that may be true; I think you are right; but——"

"But what, then? One word, Annabel: the objection would not surely come from your heart?"

"No, it would not," she softly answered, blushing deeply. "Please do not speak of these things."

"I did not intend to speak of them so soon. But I wish to remind you that I do possess a right to share your troubles, of whatever nature those troubles may be. Come, my darling, tell me your grief."

"Indeed I cannot," she answered, "and you know I am not one to refuse anything from caprice. Let me go, Charles; I must make the tea."

I did let her go; but I bent over her first, without warning, and kissed her fervently.

"Oh, Charles!"

"As an earnest of a brother's love and care for you, Annabel, if you object for the present to the other," I whispered.

"Yes, yes; be a brother to me," she returned, with strange yearning. "No other tie can now be ours."

"My love, it *shall* be."

She rang for the urn, which Perry brought in, and then sat down to the table. I placed myself opposite to her, and drew the dry toast towards me. "Mrs. Brightman prefers this, I believe; shall I prepare some for her?"

Annabel did not answer, and I looked up. She was struggling with her tears again. "I fear mamma is not well enough to eat," she said, in a stifled voice.

"Annabel," I suddenly exclaimed, a light flashing upon me: "your mother is worse than you have confessed: it is her illness which is causing you this pain."

Far greater than any that had gone before was the storm of emotion that shook her now. I rose in consternation and approached her, and she buried her face in her hands. It was very singular. Annabel Brightman was calm, sensible, open as the day. She seemed to-night to have borrowed another character. Suddenly she rose, and nervously putting my hand aside, walked once or twice up and down the room, evidently to obtain calmness. Then she dried her eyes, and sat down again to the tea-tray. I confess that I looked on in amazement.

"Will you be kind enough to ring, Charles? Twice, please. It is for Hatch."

I did so, and returned to my seat. Hatch appeared in answer to her signal. Annabel held the cup of tea she had poured out.

"Mamma's tea, Hatch."

"She won't take none, miss."

It is impossible to resist the temptation of now and then giving the grammar and idioms Hatch had brought from her country home,

and had never since attempted to alter or improve. But what Hatch lacked in accuracy, she made up in fluency, for a greater talker never flourished under the sun.

"If you could get her to drink a cup, it might do her good," pursued Hatch's young mistress. "Take it up, and try."

Hatch flirted round, giving me full view of her black streamers, and brought forward a small silver waiter. "But 'twon't be of no manner of use, Miss Annabel."

"And here's some toast, Hatch," cried I.

"Toast, sir! Missis wouldn't look at it. I might as well offer her a piece of Ingy-rubbins to eat. Miss Annabel knows——"

"The tea will be cold, Hatch; take it at once," interposed Miss Annabel.

"Annabel, who is attending your mamma? Mr. Close, I suppose."

"Mr. Close. She never will have anyone else. I fear mamma must have been ill for some time; but I have been so much away with Aunt Lucy that I never noticed it before."

"Ay; Hastings and your aunt will miss you. I suppose Mrs. Brightman will not spare you now as she has hitherto done."

Annabel bent her head over the tea-tray, and a burning colour dyed her face. What had my words contained to call up the emotion? Presently she suddenly rose and left the room, saying she must see whether the tea had been taken. She returned with the empty cup, looking somewhat more cheerful.

"See, Charles, mamma *has* taken it: I do believe she would take more nourishment, if Hatch would only press it upon her. She is so very weak and depressed."

Annabel filled the cup again, and Hatch came in for it. "Suppose you were to take up a little toast as well; mamma might eat it," suggested Annabel, placing the cup on the waiter.

"Oh, well, not to contrairy you, Miss Annabel," returned Hatch. "I know what use it will be, though."

She held out the waiter, and I was putting the small plate of toast upon it, when screams arose from the floor above. Loud, piercing screams; screams of fear or terror; and I felt sure that they came from Mrs. Brightman. Hatch dashed the waiter on to the table, upsetting the tea, and dashed out of the room.

I thought nothing less than that Mrs. Brightman was on fire, and should have been upstairs as speedily as Hatch; but Annabel darted before me, closed the drawing-room door, and stood against it to prevent my exit, her arms clasping mine in the extremity of agitation, the shrieks above still sounding in our ears.

"Charles, you must not go! Charles, stay here! I ask it of you in my father's name."

"Annabel, are you in your senses? Your mother may be on fire! She must be on fire: do you not hear her screams?"

"No; it is nothing of that sort. I know what it is. You could

do no good ; only harm. I am in my own house—its mistress just now—and I tell you that you must not go up."

I looked down at Annabel. Her face was the hue of death, and though she shook from head to foot, her voice was painfully imperative. The screams died away.

A sound of servants was heard in the hall, and Annabel turned to open the door. "You will not take advantage of my being obliged to do so, Charles?" she hurriedly whispered; "you will not attempt to go up?"

She glided out and stood before the servants, arresting their progress as she had arrested mine. "It is only a similar attack to the one mamma had last night," she said, addressing them. "You know that it arises from nervousness, and your going up would only increase it. She prefers that Hatch alone should be with her; and if Hatch requires help, she will ring."

They moved away again, slowly; and Annabel came back to the drawing-room.

"Charles," she said, "I am going upstairs. Pray continue your tea, without waiting for me; I will return as soon as possible."

And all this time she was looking like a ghost, and shaking like an aspen leaf.

I crossed to the fire, almost in a dream, and stood with my back to it. My eyes were on the tea-table, but they were eyes that saw not. All this seemed very strange. Something attracted my attention. It was the tea that Hatch had spilt, slowly filtering down to the carpet. I rang the bell to have it attended to.

Perry answered the ring. Seeing what was wrong, he brought a cloth and knelt down upon the carpet. I stood where I was, and looked on, my mind far away.

"Curious thing, sir, this illness of mistress's," he remarked.

"Is it?" I dreamily replied.

"The worst is, sir, I don't know how we shall pacify the maids," he continued. "I and Hatch both told them last night what stupidities they were to take it up so, and that what missis saw could not affect them. But now that she has seen it a second time—and of course there was no mistaking the screams just now—they are turning rebellious over it. The cook's the most senseless old thing in the world! She vows she won't sleep in the house to-night; and if she carries out her threat, sir, and goes away, she'll spread it all over the neighbourhood."

Was Perry talking Sanscrit? It was about as intelligible to me as though he had been. He was still over the carpet, and in matter-of-fact tones which shook with his exertion, for he was a fat man, and was rubbing vehemently, he continued:

"I'm sure I couldn't have believed it. I wouldn't have believed it, sir, but that I have been in the house and a witness to it, as one may say; at any rate, heard the screams. For a more quieter, amiable,



and peaceable man never lived than my master, kind to all about him, and doing no harm to anybody ; and why he should Walk is beyond our comprehension."

"Why he should—what?" I exclaimed.

"Walk, sir," repeated Perry. "Hatch says it's no doubt on account of his dying a sudden death ; that he must have left something untold, and won't be laid till he has told it. It's apparent, I take it, that it concerns Mrs. Brightman, by his appearing to her."

"What is it that has appeared to Mrs. Brightman?" I asked, doubting my ears.

Perry arrested his occupation, and raised himself to look at me. "My dead master, sir," he whispered mysteriously. "Master's ghost."

"Your master's—ghost!" I echoed.

"Yes, sir. But I thought my young lady had told you."

I felt an irreverent inclination to laugh, in spite of the serious surroundings of the topic. Ghosts and I had never had any affinity with each other. I had refused to believe in them as a child, and most unhesitatingly did so as a man. When I returned the "Old English Baron" to Annabel, some years before, she wished she had never lent it to me, because I declined to accept the ghost.

"I am sure, sir, I never supposed but what Miss Annabel must have imparted it to you," repeated Perry, as if doubting his own discretion in having done so. "But somebody ought to know it, if it's only to advise ; and who so fit as you, sir, master's friend and partner? I should send for a clergyman, and let him try to lay it ; that's what I should do."

"Perry, my good man," and I looked at his bald head and rotund form, "you are too old, and I should have thought, too sensible to believe in ghosts. How can you possibly listen for a moment to stories so absurd as these?"

"Well, sir," argued Perry, "my mistress did see it or she didn't ; and if she didn't, why should she scream and say she did? You heard her screams just now ; and they were worse yesterday."

"Did you see the ghost?"

"No, sir ; I was not up there. Hatch thought she saw it as she went into the room. It was in a corner, and wore its shroud : but when we got up there it was gone."

"When was all this?"

"Last night, sir. When you left, Miss Annabel took off her bonnet in the drawing-room and rang for tea, which I carried in. Presently Hatch ran in at the front door, and Miss Annabel told me to call her in. 'Has mamma had her tea, Hatch?' said my young lady. 'Yes, she has,' returned Hatch ; which was a downright falsehood, for she had not had any. But Hatch is master and missis too, as far as we servants go, and nobody dares contradict her. Perhaps she only said it to keep Mrs. Brightman undisturbed, for she knows

her ailments and her wants and ways better than Miss Annabel. So, sir, I went down, and Hatch went up, but not, it seems, into Mrs. Brightman's room, for she thought she was asleep. In two or three minutes, sir, the most frightful shrieks echoed through the house; those to-night were nothing half as bad. Hatch was first in the chamber, Miss Annabel next, and we servants last. My mistress stood at the foot of the bed, which she must have left ——"

"Was she dressed?" I interrupted.

"No, sir; she was in her night-gown, or a dressing-gown it might have been. She looked like—like—I don't hardly know what to say she looked like, Mr. Strange, but as one might suppose anybody would look who had seen a ghost. She was not a bit like herself. Her eyes were starting and her face was red with terror; almost all alight, as one may say; indeed, she looked mad. As to her precise words, sir, I can't tell you what they were, for when we gathered that it was master's ghost which she had seen, appearing in its shroud in the corner by the wardrobe, the women servants set up a cry and ran away. That stupid cook went into hysterics, and declared she wouldn't stop another night in the house."

"What was done with Mrs. Brightman?"

"Miss Annabel—she seemed terrified out of her senses, too, poor young lady—bade me hasten for Mr. Close; but Hatch put in her word and stopped me, and said the first thing to be done was to get those shrieking maids downstairs. Before I and John had well done it—and you'd never have forgot it, sir, had you seen 'em hanging on to our coat tails—Hatch followed us down, bringing her mistress's orders that Mr. Close was not to be fetched; and indeed, as Hatch remarked, of what use could a doctor be in a ghost affair. But this morning Miss Annabel sent for him."

"Mrs. Brightman must have had a dream, Perry."

"Well, sir, I don't know; it might have been; but she is not one given to dreams and fancies. And she must have had the same dream again now."

"Not unlikely. But there's no ghost, Perry; take my word for it."

"I hope it will be found so, sir," returned Perry, shaking his head as he retired; for he had done his work and had no further pretext for lingering.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SOMEONE ELSE SEEN.

STANDING with my back to the fire in the drawing-room, waiting for Annabel's return, the tea growing cold on the table, I puzzled over what I had just heard, and could make nothing of it. That Mr. Brightman's spirit should appear to his wife, seemed to be utterly incomprehensible; was, of course, incredible. That many people

believed in the reappearance of the dead, I well knew; but I had not yet made up my mind to become one of them.

It was inexplicable that a woman in this enlightened age, moving in Mrs. Brightman's station, could yield to so strange a delusion. But, allowing that she had done so, did this sufficiently explain Annabel's deep-seated grief?—or the remark that her grief would end only with her life; or the hint that she could never be my wife? And why should she refuse to confide these facts to me? why, indeed, have prevented my going upstairs? I might have reassured Mrs. Brightman far more effectually than Hatch; who, by Perry's account, was one of the believers in the ghost theory. It was altogether past comprehension, and I was trying hard to arrive at a solution when Hatch came in, her idioms in full play.

"My young lady's complemens, sir, and will you excuse her coming down again to-night; she is not equal to seeing nobody. And she says truth, poor child," added Hatch, "for she's quite done over."

"How is your mistress now, Hatch?"

"Oh, she's better, she is. Her nerves have been shook, sir, of late, you know, through the shock of master's unexpected death, and in course she starts at shadders. I won't leave the room again, without the gas a-burning full on."

"What is this tale about Mr. Brightman?"

Hatch and her streamers swung round, and she closed the door before answering. "Miss Annabel never told you *that*; did she, sir?"

"No; but I have heard a word or two elsewhere. You fancy you saw a ghost?"

"Missis do."

"Oh, I thought you did also."

"I just believe it's a delusion of hers, Mr. Charles, and nothing more," returned Hatch confidently. "If master had been a bad sort of character, or had taken his own life, or anything of that, why the likelihood is that he might have walked, dying sudden. But being what he was, a Christian gentleman that never missed church, and said his own prayers at home on his knees regular—which I see him a doing of once, when I went bolt into his dressing-room, not beknowing he was in it—why it is not likely, sir, that he comes again. I don't say as much to them downstairs; better let them be frightened at his ghost than at—at—anybody else's. I wish it was master's ghost, and nothing worse," abruptly concluded Hatch.

"Nothing worse! Some of you would think that bad enough, were it possible for it to appear."

"Yes, sir, ghosts is bad enough, no doubt. But realities is worse."

So it was of no use waiting. I finished my cup of cold tea, and turned to go, telling Hatch that I would come again the following evening to see how things were progressing.

"Yes, do, Mr. Charles; you had better," assented Hatch, who had a habit, not arising from want of respect, but from her long and confidential services, and the plenitude of her attachment, of identifying herself with the family in the most unceremonious manner. "Miss Annabel's life hasn't been a bed of roses since this ghost appeared, and I fear it is not likely to be, and if there's anybody that can say a word to comfort her, it must be you, sir; for in course I've not had my eyes quite blinded. Eyes is eyes, sir, and has their sight in 'em, and we can't always shut 'em, if we would."

Hatch was crossing the hall to open the door for me, and I had taken my great coat from the stand, when Annabel flew down the stairs, her face white, her voice sharp with terror.

"Hatch! Hatch! mamma is frightened again!"

Hatch ran up, two stairs at a time, and I went after her. Mrs. Brightman had followed Annabel, and now stood outside her chamber door in her white dressing-gown, trembling violently. "He is watching me again," she panted: "he stands there in his grave-clothes!"

"Don't you come," cried Hatch, putting Annabel back unceremoniously. "I shall get my missis round best alone; I'm not afraid of no ghostesses, not I. Give a look to her, sir," she added, pointing to Annabel, as she drew Mrs. Brightman into her chamber, and fastened the door.

Annabel, her hands clasped on her chest, shook as she stood. I put my arm round her waist and took her down to the drawing-room. I closed the door, and Annabel sat down on the sofa near the fire.

"My darling, how can I comfort you?"

A burst of grief prevented her from replying; grief that I had rarely witnessed. I let it spend itself; you can do nothing else with emotion so violent: and when it was over I sat down beside her.

"Annabel, you might have confided this to me at first. It can be nothing but a temporary delusion of Mrs. Brightman's, arising from a relaxed state of the nervous system. Imaginary spectral appearances——"

"Who told you about that?" she interrupted, in agitation. "How came you to hear it?"

"My dear, I heard it from Perry. But he did not break faith in speaking of it, for he thought you had already told me. There can be no reason why I should not know it; but I am sorry that it has penetrated to the servants."

Poor Annabel laid her head on the arm of the sofa, and moaned.

"I do not like to leave you or Mrs. Brightman either, in this distress. Shall I remain in the house to night? I can send a message to Leah——"

"Oh, no, no," she hastily interrupted, as if the proposal had startled her. And then she continued slowly, hesitatingly, pausing between her words: "You do not—of course—believe that—that papa——"

"Of course I do not," was my hearty reply, relieving her from her embarrassing question. "Nor you either, Annabel: although, as a child, you devoured every ghost-story you came near."

She made no confirmatory reply, only looked down, and kept silence. I gazed at her wonderingly.

"It terrified me so much last night," she whispered.

"What terrified you, Annabel?"

"I was terrified altogether; at mamma's screams, at her words, and the nervous state she was in. Mr. Close has helped to frighten me, too, for I heard him say this morning to Hatch that such cases have been known to end in madness."

"Mr. Close is—not worth a rush," cried I, suppressing what I had been about to utter impulsively. "So he knows of this fancy?"

"Yes, Hatch told him. Indeed, Charles, I do not see that there was any help for it."

"He will observe discretion, I suppose. Still, I almost wish you had called in someone who is a stranger to the neighbourhood."

"Mamma will not have a stranger, and you know we must not act in opposition to her will. She seemed so much better this morning; quite herself again."

"Of course. With the return of daylight these fancies subside. But as it seems there is nothing I can do for you, Annabel, I must be going, and will come again to-morrow evening."

The conclusion seemed to startle her. "Had—you—better come?" she cried, with much hesitation.

"Yes, Annabel, I had better come," I firmly replied. "And I cannot understand why you should wish me not to do so. As I can see you do."

"Only—if mamma should be ill again—it is all so uncomfortable. I daresay you never even finished your tea," glancing at the table. All trivial excuses, to conceal her real and inexplicable motive, I felt certain. "Good-night, Charles."

She held out her hand to me. I did not take it: I took her instead, and held her to my heart. "You are not yourself to-night, Annabel, for there is some further mystery in all this, and you will not tell it me. But the time will soon come, my dearest, when our mysteries and our sorrows must be shared in common." And all the answer I received was a look of despair.

In passing through the iron gates, I met Mr. Close. The moon to-night was obscured by clouds, but the gas-lamps revealed us plainly to each other. "How is Mrs. Brightman?" he asked.

"Very ill and very strange," I answered. "Do you apprehend any serious result?"

"Well—no," said he; "not immediately. Of course it will tell upon her in the long run."

"She has had another attack of nervous terror to-night; in fact, two attacks."

"Ay; seen the ghost again, I suppose. I suspected she would, so thought I would just call in."

"Would it not be as well—excuse me, Mr. Close, but you are aware how intimately connected I was with Mr. Brightman—to call in a consultation? Not that there is the slightest doubt of your skill and competency, but it appears to be so singular a malady; and in the multitude of counsellors there is safety, you know."

"It is the commonest malady we have to deal with," returned he; and the answer was so unexpected that I could only stare in silence.

"Have a consultation if you think it more satisfactory, Mr. Strange. But it will not produce the slightest benefit; and the less this matter is allowed to transpire, the better. I assure you that all the faculty combined could not do more for Mrs. Brightman than I am doing. It is a lamentable disease, but it is one that must run its course."

He went on to the house, and I got outside an omnibus that was passing the end of the road, and lighted my cigar, more at sea than ever. If seeing ghosts was the commonest malady doctors had to deal with, where had I lived all my life not to have learned it?

The next afternoon I was surprised by a visit from Perry. He brought word from his mistress that she was very much better, though not yet able to see me on business matters; when she felt equal to it, she would let me know. Miss Annabel, concluded the butler, was gone to Hastings.

"To Hastings!" I exclaimed.

"Well, yes, sir. My mistress decided upon it this morning, and I have just seen her off by train, with Sarah in attendance on her. Fact is, sir," added Perry, dropping his voice to a confidential key: "Hatch whispered to me that it was thought best the poor young lady should be out of the house while it is so troubled."

"Troubled!" I repeated, half in scorn.

"Why, yes, sir, you know what it is that's in it," rejoined Perry simply. "Mr. Close, too, he said Miss Annabel ought to be away from it just now."

When every hour of the day is occupied, time glides on insensibly. A week passed. I heard no news of or from Mrs. Brightman, and did not altogether care to intrude upon her, unbidden. But when the second week was also quickly passing, I determined to take an evening to go to Clapham. Dinner over, I was going downstairs, and met Leah coming up.

"If anyone calls, I am out for the evening, Leah," I said to her. "And tell Watts when he comes in, that I have left the *Law Times* on the table for Mr. Lake. He must take it round to him."

"Very well, sir."

I was nearing the top of Essex Street when I met the postman.



"Anything for me?" I inquired, for I had expected an important letter all day.

"I think there is, sir," he replied, looking over his letters under the gas-lamp. "'Messrs. Brightman and Strange;' there it is, sir."

I opened it by the same light. It was the expected letter, and required an immediate answer. So I returned, and letting myself in with my latchkey, went into the front office to write it.

Leah had not heard me come in. She was upstairs, deep in one of the two favourite ballads which now appeared to comprise all her collection. During office hours Leah was quiet as a mute; but in the evening she would generally croon over one of these old songs in an undertone, if she thought that I was out and she had the house to herself. As she was thinking now, for she sang out in full key, but in a doleful, monotonous sort of chant. Her voice was still very sweet, but had lost much of the power of its earlier days. One of these two songs was a Scotch fragment, beginning "Woe's me, for my heart is breaking;" the other was "Barbara Allen." Fragmentary also, apparently; for as Leah sang it there appeared to be neither beginning nor ending to it.

And as she wandered up and down,

She heard the bells a-ringing,

And as they rang they seemed to say,

Hard-hearted Barbara Allen.

She turned her body round and round,

She saw his corpse a-coming;

"Oh, put him down by this blade's side,

That I may gaze upon him!"

The more she looked, the more she laughed,

The further she went from him;

Her friends they all cried out "For shame,

Hard-hearted Barbara Allen!"

Whether this is the correct version of the ballad or not, I do not know; it was Leah's version. Many and many a time had I heard it; and I was hearing it again this evening, when there came a quiet ring at the street door bell. My door was pushed to, but not closed, and Leah came bustling down. Barbara Allen going on still, but in a more subdued voice.

"Do Mr. Strange live here?" was asked, when the door was opened.

"Yes, he does," responded Leah. "He is out."

"Oh, I don't want him, ma'am. I only wanted to know if he lived here. What sort of a man is he?"

"What sort of a man?" repeated Leah. "A very nice man."

"Yes; but in looks, I mean."

"Well, he is very good-looking. Blue eyes, and dark hair, and straight features. Why do you want to know?"

"Ay, that's him. But I don't know about the colour of his eyes; I thought they was dark. Blue in one light and brown in another, maybe. A tallish, thinnish man."

"He's pretty tall; not what can be called a maypole. A little taller than Mr. Brightman was."

"Brightman and Strange, that's it? 'Tother's an old gent, I suppose?" was the next remark; while I sat, amused at the colloquy.

"He was not old. He is just dead. Have you any message.

"No, I don't want to leave a message; that's not my business. He told me he lived here, and I came to make sure of it. A pleasant, sociable man, ain't he; no pride about him, though he is well off and goes cruising about in his own yacht."

"No pride at all with those he knows, whether it's friends or servants," returned Leah, forgetting her own pride, or at any rate her discretion, in singing my praises. "Never was anybody pleasanter than he. But as to a yacht——"

"Needn't say any more, ma'am; it's the same man. Takes a short pipe and a social dram occasionally, and makes no bones over it."

"What?" retorted Leah indignantly. "Mr. Strange doesn't take drams or smoke short pipes. If he just lights a cigar at night, when business is over, it's as much as he does. He's a gentleman."

"Ah," returned the visitor, his tones expressing a patronising sort of contempt for Leah's belief in Mr. Strange: "gents that is gents indoors, be not always gents out. Though I don't see why a man need be reproached with not being a gent because he smokes a honest clay pipe, and takes a drop short; and Mr. Strange does both, I can tell ye."

"Then I know he does not," repeated Leah. "And if you knew Mr. Strange, you wouldn't say it."

"If I knew Mr. Strange! Perhaps I know him as well as you do, ma'am. He don't come courting our Betsy without my knowing of him."

"What do you say he does?" demanded Leah, suppressing her wrath.

"Why, I say he comes after our Betsy; leastways, I'm a'most sure of it. And that's why I wanted to know whether this was his house or not, for I'm not a-going to have her trifled with; she's my only daughter, and as good as he is. And now that I've got my information I'll say good-night, ma'am."

Leah shut the door, and I opened mine. "Who was that, Leah?"

"My patience, Mr. Charles!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "I thought you were out, sir."

"I came in again. Who was that man at the door?"

"Who's to know, sir—and what does it matter?" cried Leah.

"Some half-tipsy fellow who must have mistaken the house."

"He did not speak as though he were tipsy at all."

"You must have heard what he said, sir."

"I heard."

Leah turned away, but came back hesitatingly, a wistful expression in her eyes. I believe she looked upon me as a boy still, and cared for me as she did when I had been one. "It is not true, Mr. Charles?"

"Of course it is not true, Leah. I neither take drams short, nor go courting Miss Betsys."

"Why, no, sir, of course not. I believe I must be getting old and foolish, Mr. Charles. I should just like to wring that man's neck for his impudence!" she concluded, as she went upstairs again.

But what struck me was this: either that one of my clerks was playing pranks in my name—passing himself off as Mr. Strange, to appear large and consequential; and if so, I should uncommonly like to know which of them it was—or else that something was being enacted by those people who made the sorrow of Leah's life; that daughter of hers and the husband—as we will call him. For the voice at the door had sounded honest and the application genuine.

Posting my letter, I made the best of my way to Clapham. But I had my journey for nothing, and saw only Perry. His mistress had been getting much better, he said, but a day or two ago she had a relapse and was again confined to her room, unable to see anyone. Mr. Close had ordered her to be kept perfectly quiet. Annabel remained at Hastings.

"And what about that fright, Perry, that you were all so scared with a fortnight ago?" I asked, as he strolled by my side back to the iron gates: for it was useless for me to go in if I could not see Mrs. Brightman. "Has the house got over it yet?"

"Sir, it is in the house still," he gravely answered.

"Do you mean the scare?"

"I mean the ghost, sir. Poor master's spirit."

I turned to look at his face, plainly enough to be discerned in the dimness of the foggy night. It was no less grave than his words had been.

"The figure does not appear every night, sir; only occasionally," he resumed, "and always in the same place—in the angle by the wardrobe in Mrs. Brightman's bed-room. It stands there in its grave-clothes."

What with the dark trees about us, the weird evening, and Perry's shrinking tones, I slightly shivered, for all my unbelief.

"But, Perry, it is *impossible*, you know. There must be delusion somewhere. Mrs. Brightman's nerves have been unstrung by her husband's death."

"Hatch has seen it twice, Mr. Strange," he rejoined. "Nobody can suspect Hatch of having nerves. The last time was on Sunday night. It stood in its shroud, gazing at them—her and the mistress—with a mournful face. Master's very own face, sir, Hatch says, just as it used to be in life; only white and ghastly."

It was a ghastly subject, and the words haunted me all the way back to town. Once or twice I could have declared that I saw Mr. Brightman's face, pale and wan, gazing at me through the fog. Certainly Hatch had neither nerves nor fancies; no living woman within my circle of acquaintance possessed less. What did it all mean? Where could the mystery lie?

Stirring the fire into a blaze when I got into my room, I sat before it, and tried to think out the problem. But the more I tried, the more effectually it seemed to elude me.

With the whirr—r—r that it always made, the clock on the mantelpiece began to strike ten. I started. At the same moment, the door opened slowly and noiselessly, and Leah glided in. Mysteriously, if I may so express it: my chamber candlestick carried in one hand, her shoes in the other. She was barefooted; and, unless I strangely mistook, her face was as ghastly as the one Perry had been speaking of that night.

Putting the candlestick on a side-table, slipping her feet into her shoes, and softly closing the door, she turned to me. Her lips trembled, her hands worked nervously; she seemed unable to speak.

"Why, Leah!" I exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"Sir," she then said, in the deepest agitation, "I have seen to-night that which has almost frightened me to death. I don't know how to tell you about it. Watts has dropped asleep in his chair in the kitchen, and I took the opportunity to steal up here. I wouldn't let him hear it for the world. He is growing suspicious, fancying I'm a bit odd at times. He'd be true in this, I know, but it may be as well to keep it from him."

"But what is it, Leah?"

"When I saw him, I thought I should have dropped down dead," she went on, paying no attention to the question. "He stood there with just the same smile on his face that it used to wear. It was *himself*, sir; it was, indeed."

May I be forgiven for the folly that flashed over me. Occupied, as my mind was, with the apparition haunting the house at Clapham, what could I think but that Leah must have seen the same?

"You mean Mr. Brightman," I whispered.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, approaching nearer to me, whilst glancing over her shoulder as if in dread that the ghost were following her: "does *he* come again, Mr. Charles? Have you seen him? Is he in the house?"

"No, no; but I thought you meant that, Leah. Who is it that you have seen?"

"Mr. Tom, sir. Captain Heriot."

*(To be continued.)*

FE

the la  
the c  
home  
wealth  
with v  
in con

Th  
can fo  
ciating  
tive o  
ago ca  
calling  
whose  
home  
had g  
short  
bring  
newsp  
many  
water,  
"I an  
medic  
rid of  
that a  
that h  
to tes  
the st  
same  
seem,  
But  
occup  
genera  
ness f  
flower  
cautio  
occup  
ever, v  
which

## A PLEA FOR THE WILD FLOWERS.

*Hints to Collectors at Home and Abroad.*

FEW things are more remarkable than the rapid advance which the love of flowers has made with all classes in society during the last few years. The effects of this are to be seen as much in the courts and alleys of our most crowded cities and in the village homes of the poorest, as in the mansions and gardens of the most wealthy. It has also developed an industry to satisfy its demands, with which the old-fashioned nurseries of the past can show nothing in common.

That this love of flowers is a mark of social improvement, no one can for a moment gainsay. There is a humanising influence in associating with flowers that, wherever it exists, cannot fail to be productive of good. We often call to mind a little incident which some time ago came under our own observation in confirmation of this. We were calling on a friend—a man of high standing in the medical profession, whose opinion was always well worth his fee. We found him just home from a hospital meeting, agitated and vexed at something that had gone wrong. He began to speak—full of his grievance—stopped short after a few minutes, rang the bell, and ordered his servant to bring him a jug of cold water and his scissors. Then, spreading a newspaper on his table, he collected all the flowers that were in the many different vases in his room, cut their stalks, gave them fresh water, and re-arranged them. This done, "There, now," he said, "I am all right now. In the whole pharmacopœia there's no better medicine for nervous agitation than that—nothing that sooner gets rid of anger, malice and all uncharitableness, with the physical ills that are sure to attend them, than re-arranging cut flowers." And who that has tried it will deny that he was right? It would be interesting to test the moral influence of association with flowers by reference to the statistics of crime. Such a reference would naturally support the same conclusion; and if so, this prevailing taste for flowers would seem, without a doubt, to merit every encouragement.

But however true it is that flowers afford not merely a pleasurable occupation, but have an undoubted influence for good on society generally, it must be admitted that this increased and increasing fondness for them is not unattended by a certain amount of harm to the flowers themselves. It seems hard to say this—hard to suggest a caution, about what, at first sight, must appear to be a very innocent occupation, and quite apart from all harm. A little reflection, however, will show that plant collecting—that is, wild plant collecting, which is at the root of the matter—must necessarily be bounded by

certain limits, or, after a time, there will be no plants left to collect. It is not an agreeable anticipation, but it is, nevertheless, quite within the range of things possible, that all the wild plants should be rooted out from any country, and the land left bare. Such, indeed, would be but the extension of what is found to be the case at present in several parts of our own islands. It is an admitted fact, that there are many places, especially in England and Wales, where, a few years ago, certain plants were abundant which are now entirely denuded; and, unhappily, it is the choicest and the rarest of our native Flora that are the first to become extinct.

The habitats of these rare plants are few, but in these days they very readily become known to professional collectors and to tourists. Handbooks of all parts, both at home and abroad, are numerous, and published at prices that bring them within reach of all, so that few persons travel without them. In most, if not all of these handbooks, there are chapters on the Flora of the parts to which they refer, giving generally a far too accurate description of the localities where any choice plants may be found.

It can hardly be a matter of wonder, then, that in these days of easy transit, when everybody is more or less a tourist, native wild plants have become scarce. Whether for their money value, or for the desire of possession, or for the mere pleasure of collecting, certain plants are continually being removed from the soil and climate that suit them best to live or die, as the case may be, in some other home.

Not unfrequently plant collecting is nothing more than a wanton amusement engaged in for the mere excitement of search, without the slightest appreciation of the plants themselves, and in utter ignorance of what to do with them when gained.

That this is no over-statement of the waste of our native Flora, and especially of ferns, which every season brings with it, must be evident to anyone who takes the smallest interest in the matter. In all the most favoured places of resort for tourists, the destruction here alluded to has for some time been going on. The south and south-west of England, Dorsetshire, Devonshire and Cornwall, the lake districts, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, places all long famous for their wild plants, have for some years been and still are great sufferers in this respect.

Railway carriages, especially in excursion trains, the seats of the drags and various vehicles that ply for hire in these parts, the decks and cabins of the different steamboats, hotels and lodgings everywhere bear testimony to this waste. We speak of what has come under our own observation, for we have visited all these places, and seen what is here described. We have seen and sorrowed at the sight—fragments of choice ferns scattered about the places where they have been found, roots that might have been preserved, or at any rate left to grow on where nature planted them, but which have been so



carelessly raised, so torn and mutilated that their would-be collectors have not thought them worth the removal. How many railway stations, how many lodging-houses in the tracts of the ordinary tourist can tell the same tale? Beautiful flowers and choice ferns, dead and dying, strew the pathway of many a holiday excursion, and are not unfrequently the only evidence of the collectors' toil.

The raid at present in our own country is upon daffodils, primroses and ferns. Daffodils and primroses are both in fashion now. The former, however, being bulbous plants, are not so readily in a wild state reproduced from seed as many other things, and consequently are in the greatest danger of being altogether lost. The Lent lilies, the single and double daffodils are fast disappearing, and other more choice varieties of the narcissus family, *N. biflorus*, *N. poeticus*, *N. rugulobus*, etc. etc., are now rarely to be found. There is a bank not far away from our own study, where years ago the lovely little Lent lilies grew and flowered in profusion—and a pretty sight it was on a bright day in spring to see them in all their native beauty—now nearly all are gone: a few occasional stragglers serve only to mark the spot.

The wild primroses, happily, will make a stouter struggle for existence. They spring up so readily from seed, and seed is generally very abundant. Still, in places within easy access of towns, it can at once be seen by any interested observer that primroses are mortal. It is, however, quite certain that the most lamentable and telling waste of the present day in our country occurs in the case of ferns. Here, again, the choicest varieties are the most exposed to the danger of total loss. The holly fern (*Polystichum Lonchitis*), the parsley fern (*Allosorus crispus*), the oak and the beech ferns (*Polypodium Dryopteris* and *P. Phegopteris*), are all fast disappearing from their favourite haunts, while a specimen of the seaside *Adiantum* (*A. Marinum*) is as hard to be found on the rocky Cornish coast now as an eagle's nest; and, happily, where a specimen can be seen, it is quite as much out of reach.

Within an hour's drive of us, in Norfolk, until the last few years, there were growing wild about seventeen varieties of our hardy British ferns. As far as one can tell from careful observation, the choicest of these within this same area have quite disappeared. *Adiantum nigrum*, *Blechnum boreale*, *Filix femina purpurea* and *Lastrea cristata* are nowhere to be found; and the magnificent *Osmunda regalis*, which spreads its giant fronds so freely in certain cars by the river's bank, is fast becoming scarce.

Not many years ago *A. nigrum* lined a roadside bank in our village, where any amount of specimens could be seen, and so elsewhere with us grew the *Blechnum*: nor love nor money could procure a wild plant of either in the village now. *L. cristata* also overran a small marsh within compass of the drive just mentioned: on our last visit not a single specimen could be found. It is the

professional collector who does the wholesale damage. His visits are well-timed; in the country lanes he is undisturbed, and he is as careful as any poacher to escape detection when trespassing on private grounds. He and his employers know the habitats of all the different ferns, and they have always a ready market for them. Only lately a large marsh boat, filled with some of the finest specimens of *O. regalis* that could be collected, and rowed by two men, was stopped on our river on its way to a certain station of the G. E. R., whence it was to be conveyed as a truck load to a London dealer.

Of course, such plundering is punishable by law; but the ill effects of it do not pass away with the punishment of the offenders. There results from it, besides the loss of plants, a severe restriction upon tourists generally, and indeed upon all country visitors who love to see nature in her wildness, and who have no wish or intention to rob her of her charms.

It is, however, hardly to be wondered at that notice boards should be found in places, once free to every wanderer, warning trespassers to "Beware." "These woods and waters are private." "Ferns and wild plants in these grounds are protected," etc. But something more than notice boards and ordinary restrictive measures are needed to meet the evils here complained of, for these from the marshy places and otherwise secluded spots, where the choicest ferns and wild flowers grow, are too easily defeated. What is needed especially is the circulation of correct information and an appeal to the good sense of tourists generally not to encourage waste themselves; and, as far as they have the means of doing so, to discourage it in others. Much good would be done if visitors would cease to buy of the "professionals" who carry specimens about in baskets, and who destroy infinitely more than they bring with them for sale. And still greater good would be effected by placing printed notices in the waiting-rooms of railway stations, in hotels and other public buildings throughout the most favoured places of our native Flora, calling the attention of tourists to the waste that is going on, and requesting them to respect the ferns and wild plants of those parts. Thoughtlessness—want of knowledge of the harm that is being done—has more to answer for than any intentional waste.

These remarks upon the state of things in our islands apply quite as forcibly to what is taking place abroad. Though the continental area is not so limited or so accessible as our own, it is, nevertheless, being visited with a destruction that is making itself severely felt. "It is a lamentable truth," says Mr. Alfred Wills, "that as far as some of the loveliest Swiss plants are concerned, their destruction is an accomplished fact, while the entire Flora of the country has undergone palpable and grievous impoverishment during the last few years."

In all the ordinary continental routes—at every railway station—at every hotel throughout the Tyrol, collectors in crowds are to be met with soliciting tourists to buy. We have ourselves seen—notably

in the Straubinger Platz, at Bad Gastein—baskets full of uprooted plants of the loveliest Edelweiss; every specimen of which would, in all probability, die, even if the purchasers in every case understood how best to keep transplanted specimens alive. It is, however, currently asserted, and with every appearance of truth, that much wilful destruction is made by these professional collectors in particular localities in order to increase the rarity of the plants they offer and keep up their market value.

It is gratifying to find that our neighbours abroad are becoming awake to their own interest. The Swiss, who by vigorous and well-directed efforts have saved their mountain Chamois from total destruction, seem equally resolute in affording protection to their mountain plants. A society, under the title of "*Association pour la Protection des Plantes*," has been established at Geneva with the two-fold object of disseminating useful information on the subject of the Alpine Flora, and undertaking to supply seedling specimens of all the different varieties at prices much below those usually extorted by the plant-hawkers. These plants raised from seed in the climate of Geneva are, of course, prepared to bear a temperature and treatment very different from their native habitat, and such seedling plants will, consequently, be found to succeed where the most carefully transplanted wild specimens will fail. These gardens at Geneva are of recent date. They were founded in 1883. We have not had an opportunity of seeing them, but from the reports by the "*Association*," which have kindly been sent to us, they appear to be doing great good, and each year testifies to a marked improvement. All the seedlings sent out are raised in pots, and so packed that they can safely be conveyed to any part of the world at all seasons. Seed also is supplied at a very cheap rate, and instructions given as to the best mode of raising plants.

The garden list of plants contains upwards of two thousand varieties, including orchids and ferns. Some few of the most rare are marked two francs and two-and-a-half, but half a franc is the general price. Packets of seeds of all sorts can be bought at half a franc each. By means of this garden at Geneva, and by the dissemination of their own useful reports, this *Association pour la Protection des Plantes* seeks to remedy a great existing wrong, and there is every reason to hope that it will do so.

A somewhat similar association would no doubt prove of great benefit in our own case.

Those persons who are desirous of knowing something more of the working of this admirable association should apply to

Monsieur H. CORREVON,

Chemin Dancet,

Geneve.

From whom they will receive all necessary information.

HENRY P. DUNSTER, M.A.

## A DEBT OF HONOUR.

## I.

MANY years ago, when I had but lately achieved the dignity of representing East Wanstead in the Conservative interest for the first time, my attention was attracted by the name of the Liberal Candidate for a manufacturing town in one of the Midland Counties. I wondered several times whether this Richard Atherstone could possibly be a strange fellow who had been at Balliol in my time, some eleven or twelve years before; a lunatic with a beautiful soul; an impracticable, hot-brained enthusiast with a guileless belief in all sorts of clap-trap; the liberty, equality and fraternity business, and so forth; and a no less childish and vehement abhorrence of all established forms.

He had earned a certain patronising respect from most of us by the sincere but hopeless efforts with which he endeavoured to carry out his theories (or principles, as he would have called them) in everyday life. He once invited all the college scouts to a wine party in his rooms, but could never afterwards be induced to refer to this entertainment, which we gathered from the gloom that seized him when we approached the subject, and from the voice of rumour, to have been of a painful and disastrous nature. It is certain that he quitted the best rooms in the college shortly after this event, and retired into melancholy lodgings, to escape, as we believed, from the importunate familiarities of the scouts who had partaken of his hospitality.

He used to take walks with a drunken radical cobbler, whom he declared to be a splendid fellow, and who was always borrowing money from him. He was cheated and imposed upon every day of his life; but every day seemed only to render him a more guileless and confiding prey for the human crows to gather around.

But at last one idea took complete possession of him, to the exclusion of all the rest: and he left Oxford suddenly to lay himself and his property at the feet of the Orpheus whose pipe had set the mountains and trees of Italy dancing after him, the rocks and stones of selfish and indolent hearts which had awakened with a flash to generous life in answer to the call.

Even I can grow enthusiastic over Mazzini. Young England was wild about him then, and it was small wonder that Atherstone was carried away altogether.

About the same time Inchkeith of Corpus, a queer creature, full of crotchets and always in opposition to everyone else, went off and enlisted on the opposite side, in the Austrian cavalry.

At  
Bella  
matri  
to es  
Ho  
youn  
expec  
and  
knew  
Engl  
plent  
enter  
was a  
affair  
Fo  
had  
to fil  
H  
soon  
his f  
Be  
ador  
separ  
curse  
but  
vent  
oppo  
The  
comp  
O  
with  
that  
supp  
twel  
vene  
Gar  
distr  
mist  
and  
day.  
S  
whic  
It w  
B  
man  
care  
with

Atherstone succeeded in bearing along with him an Italian named Bellamonte, whose mother was an Englishwoman, and who had matriculated at Balliol about two years before, seeming heartily glad to escape from the red-hot crater of Italian politics.

He was older than the rest of us, and had been married very young to a charming lady of Austrian connections, who had found it expedient to persuade her husband to leave his storm-tossed country and visit his English property. Being a wise woman, the Contessa knew that the best way of keeping her husband contentedly in England until the storm should blow over at home was to give him plenty of interests here; so she induced him to come to Oxford and enter the University. Nor was this a difficult task. Bellamonte was a fervent Anglo-maniac at this time, and almost indifferent to the affairs of his own country.

For some time all had gone well, until that firebrand Atherstone had broken into their lives like a bombshell and had put all her peace to flight with extraordinary rapidity.

He obtained an immense hold over Bellamonte at once, and very soon turned him into an ardent patriot, eager to gird on the sword of his fathers and dash into the fray.

Bellamonte was anxious to leave his wife and child, whom he adored, behind in safety, but the poor woman would not be separated from him; so they went off together. How she must have cursed the author of all this trouble in her heart is easy to imagine; but she was a fine creature, too wise and self-controlled to give vent to her wrath against her husband's idol. Besides, any untimely opposition always confirmed Bellamonte mulishly in his own opinion. The best chance for her, she knew, would be the spectacle of her uncomplaining endurance.

One mild and fine afternoon at the end of March I was dawdling with a group of other men in the old gateway of the college; a practice that has been dear to undergraduates from the beginning of time, I suppose. The sun was striking warm upon the mouldy brows of the twelve Cæsars opposite, and lighting up the dark places of the venerable "schools." The chatter of the birds building in Trinity Gardens close by, and the deep droning of St. Mary's bell, alone disturbed the sleepy stillness of the old street. The faint perpetual mist of Oxford clung like a veil round the towers; the dreamy and scholastic atmosphere of the place entered into one's being that day.

Suddenly an open carriage came rattling over the noisy cobbles which no subsequent reform has banished from the streets of Oxford. It was taking the Italians away on their journey.

Bellamonte sat erect and smiling; a handsome, southern-looking man, with rich colouring and black curly hair. His old gay and careless air had given place to one hardly less gay, but seasoned with an energy and resolution which by no means detracted from his

good looks. Opposite him sat Luigi the younger, a fine boy of seven, very like his father. When he saw us he laughed and kissed his hand, and cried "A rivederlà, Signori." His father greeted us with wild waves of his beloved umbrella, which peaceful weapon he girded on when he first came to England, and never laid aside until he exchanged it for more deadly arms.

But the Contessa ! I never saw on any human creature an expression which moved me more deeply than did hers then. She sat like a marble woman, deathly pale, her great eyes staring straight in front of her as at a vision of fate, her lips firmly closed, an image of self-contained despair.

When they came up, little Saunderson, the cox of our eight, who knew about three phrases of Italian and was very proud of them, suddenly yelled out "Viva l'Italia," as loud as he could : and for a man about the size of a respectable bullfinch it was amazing what a volume of sound he was able to produce.

We all started off and ran beside them for a little way, cheering and waving our hats. Bellamonte stood up, radiant and excited, returning our salutations with a grace unknown to Oxford. But his wife seemed still to see or hear nothing, until he bent down to touch her on the shoulder, and pointed to us who were running and shouting alongside of the carriage. Then she started, and slowly turned her head, smiling faintly at us for a moment ; a smile so heartrending that somehow we could not cheer any more, but stopped short at the corner of Magdalen Street, as the carriage swept round the church known in Oxford as "the Archipelago."

It was almost with relief that we turned at the sound of shouts from a well-known voice at this juncture. A decrepit cab, with luggage on the roof, came clattering down "the Broad," and the driver was urging his miserable beast to further and extraordinary efforts in order to catch the train.

His fare meanwhile was making a great commotion inside, shouting, rattling and battering at the doors ; but either the coachman was deaf or else he thought it was a work of supererogation to cheer him on to further exertions. At any rate, he never looked round, but only went on flogging and swearing at his horse.

A roar of laughter went up from us when we perceived Atherstone's undignified manner of departure on his romantic mission. The vehicle was in that last stage of decrepitude then a matter of course with Oxford conveyances ; let us hope the age of hansoms has changed all that now. The knight-errant was scarlet with his exertions and frenzied with anger, but the cab crawled on, and so, amid shouts of derisive laughter, Don Quixote of Balliol made his exit from Oxford and set out on his quest.

News was received from the conspirators by their particular friends in college once or twice after their departure. But as they became more and more involved in the secrets of their party it became



impossible for them to write of their danger; and I, who was never very intimate with either, soon lost sight of them altogether.

Some years later I heard that Atherstone had returned to England, and this recurred to my memory when I saw the name of the successful candidate for D—. I wondered again if it were possible that years of melodramatic intrigue and conspiracy should end in producing a sober English M.P. For it was possible in those days to belong to the party of advanced Liberals and yet to remain an ordinary English gentleman.

On the night when the new member was to take his seat, I went down to the House rather earlier than usual with some feeling of curiosity, for all I had heard about him made me think it must be the same. I wondered whether such singular and varied experiences as his must have been had tamed the fanatic, and how much altered he would be.

Altered he certainly was. It might have been a man of fifty that advanced to take the oath before the table. His long legs and the short coat buttoned about his spare form still gave it the indescribable schoolboy appearance I remembered long ago—all his coats were always too short, somehow or other, for Atherstone—but little else remained of the ardent, impetuous youth who always walked at a galloping pace, and generally talked in a sort of joyful shout or bray, as I used to call it then.

All his old buoyant, and to me quite aggressive, animation was gone. He stooped a little; he carried his head bent instead of triumphantly aloft; his cheeks, always thin, were now quite hollow and bronzed; he was beginning to get bald, and his fair hair was already quite grizzled. He had a sombre, almost fierce expression, though this latter quality may have been due to his great moustachios, which were quite in character with a Mazzinian conspirator. But I noticed when he was speaking to one of his supporters what a peculiarly sweet smile he had, though this momentary lightening gave way again immediately to the look of settled gloom and depression.

We met presently in the lobby, and greeted one another with that mingling of incoherent heartiness and embarrassment which usually characterises Englishmen on such occasions. However, we were rescued by one of the ministers beginning to speak, and accordingly prepared to hurry back to our seats. I bethought myself of asking him to come down and spend the following Sunday at my country house on the Thames.

"I should like to of all things," he said, passing his hand through his hair in perplexity; "but there's Luigi, you see. I can never leave Luigi."

"Luigi?" I repeated interrogatively. It was so like Atherstone of old to speak in this allusive strain, and forget that he needed an interpreter for his conversation.

"Luigi Bellamonte," explained Atherstone. "Oh, to be sure, you couldn't know; I forgot."

"Bellamonte!" I cried. The ice was quite broken between us now. "Of course I remember him perfectly. So he has come back to England all right! And is the Contessa with him, too? If so, pray beg them both to come with you."

Atherstone's face darkened. He turned abruptly away. "It's neither of them," he said, in a low voice; "but the son they left, from whom I never part."

Fresh mysteries here. "Well, bring him with you, at any rate," I said. "And, Atherstone, if you could manage to let me know by what train to expect you, I will send the carriage to the station to meet you. It's five miles away, remember." But recalling his habits at Balliol, I reflected afterwards that he must have changed indeed if he proved capable of this amount of forethought.

On Saturday I went down to Greenfield and waited. No word, of course, from my expected guest. I had brought a nephew of sixteen or seventeen down with me, a Harrow boy, to entertain this Luigi of Atherstone's. It was a perfect June day. The fresh woods below in the valley were loud with the singing of birds, the river flashed out between them, blue in the sunshine; the lawns were whitened with falling blossom from the chestnut and may-trees, the air was laden with a thousand scents. The carriage departed to spend the afternoon at the station; and towards six o'clock, Conway and I, lying on the short grass beside the drive, heard the wheels turning in at the upper gate.

We jumped up as they approached, and Atherstone sprang out in a disjointed sort of way. A pale youth, about eighteen or nineteen, with large dark eyes and black curly hair, sat still in his place, smiling vaguely and sweetly, but without speaking or moving. He looked to me like a pale ghost of the brilliant young Italian who had bid us all good-bye so gaily twelve years before, but the eyes were the eyes of Margherita Bellamonte; it was absolutely startling.

Atherstone turned to him when he had greeted us.

"Come, Luigi, and speak to Mr. Holbrook. He used to be a friend of yours when you were a little boy."

He spoke in a tone of gentle authority, which I afterwards noticed that he always used in addressing the boy. Luigi obeyed with the docility of a well regulated child. He was tall and well made when he stood up, though not so tall as his guardian. He turned to Atherstone, still with the same vague smile, and asked:

"Was that before?" indicating me.

"Yes, before," replied my friend, averting his face.

"Oh, then, of course I could not remember you," said Luigi, turning to me, as if no further explanation were needed. He spoke English perfectly, in a soft, musical voice; his manner was charming

and quite unembarrassed. My nephew Conway, glowering in hot self-consciousness in the background, despised him for it I saw.

I felt very much perplexed, but asked no questions, for it was easy to see in spite of his graceful manner that there was something wrong with poor Luigi. He had no more initiative than a baby; he had almost to be told to put one foot in front of the other, and never spoke except in answer to a question. Poor Conway evidently thought I had treated him very badly in foisting such a visitor upon him for entertainment.

At dinner we all began to get on well. Atherstone told some amusing election stories, and Conway cheered up immensely. He was panting to hear some tales of blood and adventure, with the prospect of which I had bribed him to assume a somewhat less disgusted and injured appearance.

Just as we were setting to work on our fish I noticed an odd change in the Italian boy's face. The gentle, vacant smile had disappeared, and he was looking about him with an anxious, apprehensive expression. A young Viennese footman whom I had lately engaged handed him the fish sauce; he shrank away and stared up at Hans with an expression of horror and fury which amazed that luckless youth, who stood there still proffering the peaceful sauce-boat. Atherstone, absorbed in the story he was relating, noticed nothing. I told Hans in German to pass on, but had scarcely spoken the words before Luigi started up with an incoherent exclamation, and staggering back a step or two, fell senseless on the floor.

Atherstone was beside him in a moment, the butler and Hans rushed to the rescue. "For heaven's sake send that German boy out of the room," exclaimed Atherstone, when Luigi showed signs of coming to life again.

## II.

LATER in the evening, when peace was restored, Luigi upstairs, and Conway relieving his feelings by setting night-lines in the big pond, my friend and I sat out in the verandah smoking cigars in the warm twilight. Atherstone was silent for some time, but presently, heaving a mighty sigh, he spoke.

"I owe you some explanation," he began, thrusting his hand through the long locks at the side of his head till they stood out at right angles to it, with an action familiar of old.

"Not at all," I said, crossing one knee comfortably over the other. "Don't attempt any unless you feel inclined. I am afraid, though, you are in trouble. You look worn out, and you have a heavy burden on your hands. It is just like you, Atherstone, to sacrifice yourself in this manner. I call it over-indulgence in benevolent action carried to an intemperate excess. If you must act guardian to that poor boy, why can't you get someone to look after him instead of giving up your whole life to him in this way?"

Atherstone interrupted me with a groan of anguish.

"Give up *my* whole life!" he cried. "You little know what you are talking about. Do you know, Holbrook, that I am a murderer, that the deaths of Luigi's father and mother both lie at my door, and that the wreck of himself is all my fault, my fault!"

He grew louder and louder in his excitement; it was necessary to calm him. I was startled, I own, and should have been more so if these statements had been made by anyone less extravagant in speech and action than Atherstone.

"My dear fellow," I said, "you look like the remorseful Weelyam of the melodrama. Men who have really committed murder don't treat it in this sort of style. Do be calm and tell me your story in a manner suited to my plain and unpoetical imagination. I have little doubt that you will prove to be a quite conventionally respectable character after all."

A little gibing reduced him quickly to a more collected frame of mind, and he went on:

"I should like to tell you about it. It is so long since I have seen anyone belonging to the old days. I had begun to think they never existed, except in my own imagination. The sight of you seems to bring it all back and make real that impossibly happy old life. Here are you at thirty-four, a young man with a career before you; prosperous, able, making your mark in the world, with nothing but hope in the future and no regrets in the past. While I at the same age have nothing but the wreck of a miserable life left, and the irreparable harm I have done embodied in human form always before me. Well, it cheers me somehow to be near you for a bit and sit in the sunshine of your prosperity. I had almost come to disbelieve in the existence of happiness."

I gave a grunt of sympathy and of disapprobation of these morbid sentiments, and he started again.

"You remember how I persuaded Bellamonte to go back and take part in the war of Italian Unity, and how we all went off from Oxford together?"

"I remember all the circumstances perfectly," I replied; "though how you ever succeeded in reaching the station whole and sound in wind and limb has been a subject of speculation for my leisure moments ever since."

He did not seem to hear, and after a few moments of absorbed reflection, leaning forward with his hands plunged in his hair, went on.

"Our head-quarters were at Milan. We met the chief there; and he was delighted to welcome Count Bellamonte, a man of property and influence in that part of the world, and one of the finest fellows that ever walked the earth. Bellamonte was employed in all sorts of ways. His wife's Austrian connections made him valuable where negotiations were concerned, from his knowledge of the

feeling on the opposite side. Moreover he turned out a splendid soldier; so Garibaldi gave him a high command in the army and relied upon him to carry through every sort of daring enterprise. No undertaking was ever too desperate for Bellamonte, and his men would follow him anywhere. His gay and dauntless courage sustained them in emergencies, and brought them by sheer pluck out of many a pass that would have seemed absolutely hopeless to anyone else.

"His wife had a terrible time, continually moving about the country after him with the boy; continually forced to fly from one place to another before the advance of her own countrymen; never knowing when she parted from her husband whether she would ever see him again. Her family and friends heaped the bitterest reproaches upon her for having, as they supposed, turned traitor to her country, and brought Luigi back to fight against them. I knew that I had been the means of bringing about all her sufferings; and though I was generally sure of having done right in the main, still I can tell you, Holbrook, it was pretty hard work to meet that unhappy woman with the consciousness that I was the cause of her misery, and that she knew it even better than I. Yet she never addressed a word of reproach to me. I often wished that she would. She never spoke to me at all if she could help it; and sometimes, when I watched her growing thinner and paler, an awful doubt seized me as to whether I was not, in reality, the blackest villain on earth. There was a look in her eyes, when she did turn them upon me, that made me feel uncommonly like it. I did all I could to help her; but if ever she found out that any arrangements for her comfort or safety were my doing, she would reject them at once; or if it was necessary for the child's sake, took any service from me as if it would have choked her. Bellamonte in vain tried to persuade his wife to take the boy with her, and wait for him in safety on the other side of the Swiss frontier, but no power on earth could induce her to leave him, though she was, of course, continually separated from him by the chances of the campaign. She clung to him as closely as she could, and followed him as closely as Assunta did the General.

"This went on for nearly four years, and all that time I was struggling in vain to join the army. My one desire was to fight, but greatly to my disappointment, the chiefs decided that I was more useful to them in other capacities. To take messages between them for instance, when they were in hiding, and to be a centre of communication generally. Being an Englishman, and apparently unattached to either party, I was able to move about tolerably freely, and escaped suspicion for an incredible time, to my surprise; for, as you know, diplomatic craft and subtlety are not much in my line. I hated the hole-and-corner business; I longed to go in and give some hard blows for the cause; but you can no more help doing what Mazzini bids you, than you can help putting one foot before the other when you

walk. They said all my blundering, ridiculous ways were really most useful to them; they misled wisecracks on the other side into believing me a harmless British simpleton.

"But in the end, to my great delight, the enemy got on the right scent. I was no use as a messenger any more, and the long-desired commission for Garibaldi's army at last arrived.

"We were all at Milan together just then. It was held by the Austrians, but negotiations were on foot, and we believed that we were in no danger. Besides, we were well disguised and in hiding with those whom we could trust. I had secured comfortable and safe quarters for the Bellamontes without the Contessa knowing that she was at all indebted to me in the matter. I was in tremendous spirits, and just on the point of setting out to make my way to the army, when a message arrived purporting to come from one of the chiefs, who did not know I had got my commission, directing me to give a verbal message on the second day from that time to someone whom I was to meet at a spot named, about a mile from the town.

"I was thrown into raging perplexity. My orders were to join the regiment at once. Any delay seemed to me like dashing the cup from my lips in the moment of attainment. I could not endure the hindrance, and the message seemed to be one of quite secondary importance. Bellamonte came to my help, and undertook to carry the communication. I could not see that there was any risk in connection with it; so I thankfully accepted his offer, and departed to join my regiment, which was then near Leghorn.

"A week afterwards I received a letter from Milan, directed in a hand that was somehow familiar to me. I opened it, and saw to my amazement the signature of Inchkeith at the end. Inchkeith of Corpus—do you remember him? A short, black-haired, cantankerous man, who went into the Austrian cavalry just about the same time we left Oxford."

"I remember him perfectly," I said. "Go on, old fellow." But he paused for several minutes, his face hidden in his hands.

"That letter," he continued brokenly at last, "told me that Bellamonte was dead—his wife dying—that he had named me as guardian of their boy, who might or might not live until I arrived. No particulars were given. There was a pass enclosed from the Austrian general, and an urgent appeal to come at once to Milan. I got leave, I suppose, and went like a man walking in his sleep. I read the letter over and over again, but I could not take it in. I was not capable even of wondering how all this had come about. They told me afterwards that whenever anybody spoke to me I could say nothing but 'Bellamonte is dead, his wife is dying, and Luigi too.' They thought I was mad, and so I was; quite mad; or rather idiotic, for the time. But when I arrived in Milan and drove through the familiar streets, this dazed condition began to pass off, my frozen



brain awoke, and shrank horror-stricken before the thing which it had to face.

"When I arrived at the house in the narrow street behind Sant Ambrogio, Inchkeith in his Austrian uniform met me half-way up the stone staircase and dragged me into an apartment below that which the Bellamontes occupied.

"'The little boy has taken a turn for the better,' he said. 'Come in here and rest a few minutes before you go up to the fourth floor. I am going to make you take some of this old Burgundy; you look more dead than alive.' He had led me, while speaking, into a room where there was a table set out with food and wine. I staggered to a chair and waved him away. 'The Contessa,' I gasped. 'What news of her?'

"He turned away abruptly and set down the glass he had filled on the table. There was silence in the room for a minute or two. Then: 'It is better so,' said Inchkeith presently, speaking with his back turned towards me; 'it is far better. She went very peacefully at sunrise this morning. Thank God she never awoke to the consciousness of what had happened after we brought her home. Upon my word it would be well if that poor little fellow upstairs were to follow his father and mother, as things are likely to be with him.' 'For Heaven's sake,' I said, 'tell me quickly how it all came about. Tell me all, all.'

"'My dear fellow, you are worn out,' said Inchkeith. 'I won't say another word till you have had some wine.' 'I won't touch it,' I cried, stamping with impatience, for a horrible suspicion was beginning to gather form in my mind. 'Do you want to drive me mad? Go on, go on!'

"And then he told me all. It seemed that when Bellamonte was about to start on his errand, his wife became unaccountably nervous and reluctant to let him go. The maid who had stayed by her through all those troublous times told us afterwards that she had flung herself on her knees before her husband, imploring him to stay at home and leave the message undone, in a wild way very unlike her usual courageous resignation. She said she had forebodings; but the Count thought them merely the result of physical weakness from the long strain on her nerves, and tried to laugh them away. Finding that he was determined to go, she became calm, but nothing would hold her back from accompanying him. After trying for some time to dissuade her he gave in, not supposing that there was really any risk in the expedition.

"Little Luigi and this maid went with his parents. They were all disguised as peasants, and strolled through the pleasant October sunshine to a little vineyard a mile or two beyond the city. A horse and cart were fastened to a tree, but nobody was in sight; so they sat down to wait. Luigi laughed and played with a little dog he found there; and Bellamonte, lying at his wife's feet, tried in every

way to cheer and rouse her from her depression. Presently he pulled a trail of reddened autumn leaves from the vine and bound them together, singing a gay little peasant's song the while. He had never been more merry and unsuspecting of danger, said the maid. When he had finished his crown he placed it on his wife's head, and bent down to kiss her.

"At this moment the little dog, excited probably by Luigi's games, gave some short sharp barks. There was a sudden gleaming of white uniforms through the vines and a clanking of swords and spurs. Bellamonte started up with an exclamation, and pulled a pistol from his bosom. Margherita threw herself silently and swiftly in front of him, but he pushed her aside with gentle violence, and told her for the boy's sake to keep behind. The vineyard was completely surrounded by a detachment of the cavalry regiment to which Inchkeith belonged. He himself was of the party, as also Margherita's eldest brother.

"The message brought to me had been an entire fabrication, a trap of the enemy's, who were watching the spot, but who had not known how valuable a prey was to fall into their hands. Bellamonte was of course overpowered immediately. That was a war waged with deadly hatred on both sides; deeds of violence were common enough.

"The order had been given beforehand that whoever was taken prisoner at this rendezvous should be shot as a spy on the spot, and the officer in command bade them make ready to carry it out. Margherita clung to her husband like a madwoman. He was quite calm and collected. He smoothed her hair and soothed her like a child, entreating her to go home at once with her boy, to take him away directly, so that they might not see the end. The rough soldiers themselves began to be deeply moved by the scene and with admiration of his courage. Inchkeith was tolerably inured to bloodshed, but he turned away, sickened at the thought of butchering this brave man, whom he recognised as his old acquaintance at Oxford.

"Margherita, suddenly perceiving her brother amongst the officers, flew to him and revealed herself, with agonised entreaties that he would save her husband. Unhappily, the officer in command dared not dispute the orders he had received, and the revelation that one of his most dangerous enemies had fallen into his hands only confirmed Bellamonte's doom.

"The Colonel was apprehensive of the effect of the scene if prolonged upon his men, and bade them prepare to carry out the sentence at once. Margherita's shrieks at first were terrible to hear; they mingled with those of her child and the maid. But when she saw that there was no hope of mortal aid and small space for parting, she collected herself with an extraordinary effort of will, that she might not embitter and lose these last moments. Bellamonte's courage had never seemed to waver, but the sound of her wa

said, was worse than death to him. He appealed to Margherita's brother for the protection of his wife and child, until such time as they should be able to leave for England, whither he begged her to go without delay, to his aunt.

"The brother, a weak creature, was too helpless and unnerved to answer. Inchkeith came forward and told Bellamonte that he was resolved to relinquish his commission at once, and that he would never leave the Contessa and her child till he had brought me to their help, or had handed them over himself to their relations in England. He thanked him, and gave him messages for me.

"After this Bellamonte called the boy to him and kissed him, took his wife in his arms for one long minute, and then firmly disengaged himself from her clinging hands. She was barely conscious when he handed her over to Inchkeith, and said, 'Take her away at once.' Then he walked away with a firm step between his guards, through trailing lines festooned from tree to tree, towards the fatal field. She revived after he had disappeared, and could not be kept back from following him, despite Inchkeith's desperate endeavours to restrain her. When she reached the open space, her husband was standing about one hundred yards away, the soldiers drawn up in line before him, waiting for the word to fire. She fell on her knees beside an olive tree from sheer inability to stand, and wound one arm round its old gnarled trunk to support herself.

"Inchkeith said that most strange and terrible scene will haunt him to his dying day: it all took place with such extraordinary rapidity. The afternoon's sunshine flooded the country; the silence was only broken by the distant sounds of peaceful labour and the shouts of children at their play, unconscious of the tragedy that was being enacted a few hundred yards away. The little line of soldiers, with their accoutrements flashing in the sunshine; the solitary figure of the man who was bearing himself so bravely, standing where I ought to have been, his bright and happy life suddenly to be cut off for no fault or crime; beneath the olive tree the pale and wasted beauty, bowed with her great agony, in the gay contadina's dress, still unconsciously wearing the Ophelia garland with which her husband had crowned her a quarter of an hour before.

"When the flash came from eleven rifles, Inchkeith clapped his hand over her eyes, but they were darkened already, and at the sound of the report she fell to all appearance as lifeless as her husband on the grass. No one had any attention to bestow on Luigi, or had noticed when he started running towards his father, crying bitterly. He reached the spot just as Bellamonte fell dead, pierced with eleven bullets. The child threw himself on the body, shrieking aloud, and the soldiers, all unmanned themselves, tried in vain to draw him gently away. At last he fainted, and was carried to the covered cart that was waiting close by.

"Inchkeith, gathering up the Contessa as easily as if she were a

child, placed her beside her boy. The body of the dead man was carried on a stretcher in front, the soldiers closed in behind, and the cart with its unconscious burden brought up the procession. Margherita Bellamonte only awoke some hours afterwards to fall into raving delirium. The sufferings of the last four years had been gradually wearing her away; the last cruel shock was the finishing blow. After a few days raving and tossing, she, too, was at rest.

"The child had been lying at death's door with brain fever, but the doctor had that morning declared that he would recover, though he hinted darkly at possible life-long consequences of that fatal day.

"When Inchkeith had finished his story, I suddenly found myself lying on the floor, with him forcing wine or something between my teeth. But this was no time for me to give way. I dared not even think. The horrible thought of the ill which I had wrought unknowingly lay in the back of my mind like a savage beast waiting for the moment to spring and catch me in its fangs. I went to take up my post by Luigi's bedside. I have never left him since for more than a few hours. It is nearly seven or eight years now since then.

"As I went upstairs I saw a door open and a darkened room. Some mysterious attraction drew my reluctant feet across the threshold to a bed, draped in white and covered with flowers, which stood in one corner. Still impelled by that irresistible impulse, I drew near, and looked at a face which I dreaded to see again. There I stood—the involuntary murderer—and looked at my victim. Remorse, despair and pity were all for the moment hushed. I was only conscious of envy, and longing to share the still repose to which that worn and tortured spirit had attained. Her beauty had never faded in all those years of perpetual anxiety and hardship; it had only become more and more spiritual in proportion as she grew worn and wasted. She lay now so quiet at last, after life's fitful fever. Do you remember how delicate and fine her features were? They were still more sharply chiselled after these four years. The long black lashes rested on her cheeks; her dark crisp hair, waving low on the forehead, was crowned with the drooping, faded wreath her husband had made for her in the last hour of his life. I don't know how long I stood there, but at last Inchkeith came and led me away and shut the door.

"As soon as Luigi was well enough to move I took him to England, and Inchkeith left us to go to America. Bellamonte's aunt was dead, and I, in any case, should have taken charge of him. It was long before the boy grew comparatively strong in body; his memory and reasoning powers never came back, and never will. As you see him now, so he has been ever since, and so he will remain to the end. He remembers nothing of that day except what he calls a black cloud; all that went before, all recollection of his father and mother, has completely gone. But though he has no idea of the meaning of

that black cloud which came over him, strangely enough the presence of any German, the sound of that language, which was the one spoken by those who put his father to death, throws him into the wild state of excitement you saw to-night.

"There, Holbrook! Now you know all. Can you wonder that I feel myself a murderer? Can even your cheerful optimism stand against a case like this?"

For some minutes I could not speak, the strange and tragic tale had absorbed me completely. The old church clock struck one, the night jar was busy with his eerie whirr in the dark and fragrant meadow close by. At last I recollected myself, but all the words that rose to my lips seemed hopelessly lame and inadequate to meet such a case as this.

"My poor Atherstone," I said, "you do wrong to embitter your life with these vain and needless self-reproaches. You and they were the victims of a cruel accident; that was all. From the first you acted from the highest motives; that is the most we can any of us do. You are not to blame; indeed, you are not to blame for any part of it."

"I *am* to blame," he said. "An undisciplined nature, carried away by every hasty impulse, is always to blame, and may, like me, bring more fatal woe upon its fellow-creatures than many a wretch who is hung on the gallows."

"Do not allow yourself to magnify your share of the blame—since you insist upon its being such—in this extravagant way," I said. "Is not this in itself one of those ill-regulated tendencies which you condemn so severely? Is the prime of your life, the years that are ripe for achievement, to be squandered in useless regrets and that vain misery of remorse in which no man has a right to consume the powers that still remain to him for the service of mankind? When once a lesson is learnt, when once it is well branded in, then away with this enervating paralysis of remorse, which is in itself almost as mischievous as crime."

I was mounted on my favourite hobby now, from which it is always difficult to dislodge me, but I spare my readers the bulk of my discourse. For some time longer I exhorted and argued with him, but I doubt whether I succeeded in lightening any portion of his load. It is seldom that it is granted to any human creature to be of much real help or comfort to any other where his need is the sorest.

We got through the next day very well on the whole. Hans was temporarily banished from the scene, and poor Luigi resumed his usual docile and smiling demeanour, though occasionally he looked about him anxiously, in the way that some people do when they feel that there is a cat in the room. I discovered, however, that one power had remained to him in the general wreck. He had the most sympathetic and beautiful voice I ever heard, and sang with a power and expression that must have been purely instinctive, seeing that the words on

his lips probably conveyed little or no meaning to him. There was something akin to pain in hearing that wonderful voice ring out an old Italian song of triumph, Carissimi's "Vittoria," just as his father had done before him many and many a time.

During the autumn recess I heard no more of Atherstone and his charge. Just before Parliament met in the following February I saw that his seat was again vacant. He wrote to me from Cannes to say that Luigi had been dangerously ill and was ordered to spend the winter in the South of France, so that he had been forced to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds.

Several months afterwards a variety of circumstances led me to Italy, and it came to pass that one sunny evening I lay basking on the roof of Milan cathedral amongst the intricate lace work of the decorations, looking down upon the fertile, peaceful Lombard plain. In a sort of torpid, sun-baked fashion, I tried to picture the terrible scenes whose memory seemed to have passed like the battle-smoke from the landscape. Far away, veiled in golden mists, loomed in shadowy shape the giants of the Alpine range. Lying on the warm leads with half-closed eyes I heard footsteps approaching, and presently a familiar, long-legged form passed in front of me, and leaned over the parapet bareheaded, absorbed in meditation. I got up and laid my hand on his shoulder. He turned round with a start, and greeted me with a miserable smile.

"How is it you are here, of all places in the world?" I demanded. "Where is Luigi?" It must have been decreed in the book of our destinies that I should invariably ask Atherstone the most unfortunate questions.

He drew me to the parapet and pointed out a little campanile rising from the fields a mile or two beyond the town. "I laid him there," he said, "this afternoon, beside his father and mother. Do you see that clump of trees? About one hundred yards to the right is the spot, which ought to have been my death-place, where his father fell. It is all over now, Holbrook; there is nothing more left for me to live for. Pray heaven the end may come soon!"

"The end," I cried. "Don't talk like that, Atherstone; it is weak, unmanly; you have no right. The end, indeed! Why, man, this is but the beginning; the beginning of a newer, happier life!"

"Too late! too late!" he groaned, and suddenly I turned to see his shoulders vanishing down the winding stairs.

I never saw Atherstone again, but a few months afterwards his death was reported from some remote corner of the Soudan, whither he had gone to help in suppressing the slave trade, and had died of fever. And so that eager, self-tormenting spirit was at rest at last. Peace be with his ashes!

M. C. BIRCHENOUGH.



## STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

## LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF SKETCHING.

BY PHILIP H. CALDERON, R.A.

SKETCHING? Oh, dear, yes! there is nothing I like better. To tell you the truth, I doubt whether an artist is ever really thoroughly happy except when sketching out-of-doors from Nature.

In the studio the practice of our art is full of troubles and anxieties. One moment of supreme happiness we have, no doubt; and that is when we first think of a new picture—when we *create* it, and out of nothing, make something—but that moment is a short one, and is followed by weeks and months of hard, steady and difficult work.

Pictures (I mean *real* pictures, and not mere stupid transcripts of facts) have to be composed, balanced, studied. The artist's model you dear people speak about can only be used as helps towards the realisation of the imaginary creatures we desire to depict. True expression in the actions, pathos in the faces, smiles and tears, have to be evolved from the painter's brain. The production of even a bad picture is therefore of necessity a very serious and anxious thing.

But sketching out-of-doors implies none of these worries. Up in the morning early, after a sound breakfast the artist starts for his day's work. In one hand he carries his sketching-block or mounting-board, whilst the other flourishes his folded camp-stool. In such light marching-order (for heaviness of baggage spoils the whole fun) he plunges across the fields in search of a good "motif" for the day. The coolness of the night has brought out the thousand perfumes of the country-side; the dew is still heavy in the shadow of the tall hedges; birds are twittering all around; and the labourer, not recognising the implements of our trade, mistakes the sketcher for a gentleman and gives him a cheery "good morning."

For complete happiness, give me a small open space on the skirts of a deep wood, where pigeons coo the livelong day. The sense of peace is simply entrancing. Nothing stirs at first; but, by-and-bye, encouraged by the stillness, the tiny field-mouse emerges from his hiding-place and trots about unconcerned at one's very feet, and the squirrel squats within a yard's length of one's nose, and daintily sets to work on a new-found nut. A slight movement of the hand, an involuntary jerk of the foot, and P-r-r-r-r-r! they are gone! the field-mouse to some hole, the squirrel ten yards up a beech-tree. Not for long, however. Curiosity vanquishes Fear (capital subject for a painter of the Allegorical School), and after sundry hesitations,

sly peepings and short retreats, they return to keep the sketcher company.

And so, working leisurely and watching the inner-woodland life, the autumn day slips joyfully away. Should the sketch turn out, on inspection, to be a complete failure, it is soon torn into fragments and thrown under the grate. No bad sketch ever interfered with the night's sleep. The "fiasco" of to-day makes one all the more eager for the success of to-morrow.

But you will say, "Are there no drawbacks to that happy sketching time? No shadows to that idyllic picture?" Well, you see—y—y—yes! there are *some* shadows, no doubt. In chalk counties the "harvest bug" is most decidedly a shadow; a shadow that will crawl up one's legs at any hour of the day, and *not* always stop at the knee. In heathy counties, the midge is certainly a shadow; a shadow that creeps around the most delicate curves of the ear, and loves tender eyelids above all things. Again, in *all* counties the tramp is a shadow; a dirty, skulking and highly-flavoured shadow. Time is of no object to him; he would as lief stand or sit behind you for two hours as one. As a rule he does not speak—merely stands there. His presence so irritates the nerves, and the faint, sickly smell of his clothes so taints the air, that smoking soon becomes a necessity. He at once sees an opening, and begs a pipeful of tobacco. Glad to get rid of him at any price, one gives him a supply, and he starts on his idle tramp again.

These are *material* annoyances; they come, they go! The tramp goes first, the "midge" second, the "harvest bug" last of all; and they are all soon forgotten.

One annoyance of another kind always remains, however, and rankles in the sketcher's breast. Men of culture and taste often seek our society and our friendship; gallant soldiers have been known to speak to us; ladies of quite respectable connection (I have heard) have occasionally adored some fortunate members of our craft; but the horrible truth cannot be concealed that the artist is *not* looked up to by the agricultural population. He does *not* stand high in their esteem. Nay! I have sometimes thought that he stands very, *very* low!

In the rustic's eye, a travelling horse-dealer has a recognised and honourable profession; a cat's-meat man follows a tangible trade; a master chimney-sweep is a householder, who may some day rise to be a churchwarden. But a creature who fritters away his time sketching dilapidated barns and tumble-down cottages is a "déclassé;" a "loafer;" a poor feckless fool! And, mind you, courteous behaviour and quiet, friendly speech in no way improve our position with the natives. Our talk is not their talk; our jokes are not their jokes; our "indoor" voices are too low and gentle for rustic encounters.

The late E. M. Ward (the painter of the Last Sleep of Argyle) used

to relate with great glee, and with his extraordinary powers of mimicry, one of his sketching experiences.

E. M. Ward was a tall strong man of large limbs, and (in appearance at least) of great muscular power. Whilst he was sketching one day, a typical British farmer came and stood behind him ; silent of speech, but now and then giving vent to a loud snort. Ward, growing nervous under this treatment, looked up into the farmer's face, and, in his politest manner, said : " I hope I am not trespassing ? "

" Trespassing ? " said the farmer. " Trespassing ? I don't know about *trespassing* ! but why don't you go and *work*, you beggar ? You're strong enough—you're big enough—why don't you go and *work* ? " And with another indignant snort he strode away, leaving Ward speechless.

Scenes of a similar character take place on most sketching expeditions. Once, and once only, did the victory rest with me in one of these encounters.

I was working (in oil) inside the church of dear old Winchelsea. I sat in the aisle, near the alabaster tomb, and my subject was the Sedilia in the corner. Suddenly the big key grated in the lock, the heavy door swung round, and a number of people came in. Not a fashionable party from Hastings this time ; I could tell this much by their walk. No dainty pit-a-pat of small shoes, but the heavy tramping and squeaking of country-made boots. No gay chatter of indiscriminate gush over worm-eaten pews, but complete silence for awhile.

After a few minutes, however, one of the visitors began to ask short questions in a hard, sharp voice, that resembled a bark. I looked over my shoulder at the speaker, and took stock of him. He was a small, brisk man, with a fresh face, a turned-up nose, and bold eyes—evidently an impudent man. I classed him at once as an auctioneer and surveyor in a small country town ; a man accustomed to speak in public, and probably given to " shutting up " slow bidders. He was clearly the *esprit fort* of the party ; their mouth-piece ; his friends looked up to him, and expected much of him.

In due course they all came my side of the church, and gathered thick and close around me, the surveyor keeping his spirits up by slapping his right leg hard with his walking-stick. I was becoming impatient. Suddenly he tapped my canvas smartly and contemptuously with his stick, and said, in his loudest, and most bark-like voice :

" D'ye doo thaat by measure or by heye, young man ? "

I looked up into his face pleasantly, and with marvellous presence of mind and exquisite wit, replied :

" By heye ! "

To my intense surprise, the man was utterly floored. I cannot make out why to this day. Perhaps he had not expected such readiness and brilliancy of repartee on the part of a mere artist. Perhaps I

had unwittingly hit upon the kind of answer that was considered telling in his social circle. Anyhow, he simply walked away, humbled and crestfallen, his friends followed silently, evidently thinking much less of him. But that happened long, long ago. I was young then, and in full possession of my faculties. I could not rise to such a high level now !

That contempt for the sketcher is not exclusively an English feeling, but exists in other countries among the lower classes, the following sad story will show.

The worst fall I ever experienced was in artistic France, in comparatively recent and historic times. Do you remember a picture of mine called "*Les Coquettes—Arles?*" Three Arles girls walking arm-in-arm, giggling and pretending not to be aware of the presence of a handsome young Béarnais—who, for his part, struts and "peacocks" behind them quite unconscious of the excitement he is creating ?

I knew exactly where my background was, and went to Arles to make a study of it. From the centre of the quaint old town, a narrow street runs up-hill. Near the top, and turning sharp to the right, is a narrower causeway that leads to the cloisters of St. Trophyme, and through the cloisters to the church.

The causeway has a high wall on one side, and a low parapet on the other ; and many feet below the parapet are the remains of the Roman theatre. The semi-circular rows of stone seats are still there ; broken, indeed, and decayed, but clearly traceable. Ruins of broken shafts lie about, half buried in the long, burnt-up grass ; two columns alone are standing, rearing their heads into the clear blue sky.

This is the background I wanted. I began work the very next morning, my back to the high wall, and the low parapet opposite to me. It was a perfect day. The air was so still that the long brown grass never stirred. Silence reigned supreme. No impertinent sparrows frisked or chattered about. The French cannot afford to keep them ; they eat them instead, roasted—ten of them strung on a wooden skewer, with little bits of fat bacon in between.

The lizards and I had the place all to ourselves ; I working away for dear life, the lizards flashing across and over the parapet, apparently taking suicidal headers into the theatre below.

Gradually I became aware of a low musical sound far, far away. It was so faint that it was impossible to "put a name to it." It was a "sound," and no more. It ceased ; then came again, stronger and clearer ; evidently church music.

I was thinking of getting up and strolling into the church, when I saw the head of a procession on my left emerging from the steep street, and moving down my narrow causeway. On the procession came, nearer and nearer. Acolytes, with long silver crosses held up aloft ; priests and choristers singing a solemn dirge ; old-fashioned church instruments, called "serpents," sending forth deep, lugubrious

notes ; officials, civil and military, surrounding the coffin, and holding the tassels of the rich velvet pall ; the mayor of the town in his tri-colour scarf ; the colonel of the garrison in full uniform, his broad chest glittering with medals and stars ; the long line of mourners—all filed before me, with slow and solemn steps, as I stood there with head bent and bare in respect for the dead.

It all seemed like a dream, and moved me strangely. I felt that quiver of the nostril, that blanching of the skin, which come in moments of deep emotion. And I never stirred a muscle until the last mourner had passed, and the music had again fainted away in the distance.

I was preparing to resume my work, when a hideous figure came slouching up the causeway. The creature had "felon" written all over him. It was written in his shapeless, gaping shoes, in his baggy blue calico trousers, in his filthy blouse, hanging in shreds over his hairy wrists ; most of all, in his low-typed face, with sloppy mouth, big jaws, and small hungry eyes.

He stopped in front of me, and, in vile French and husky voice, said : "What d'ye think of that?"

Unwilling to discuss the matter with him, I stupidly asked : "Who was it?"

His little, ugly eyes glittered, he craned his dirty neck towards me, and in an angry voice replied :

"Who was it? One of those money-grubbers, it was ! One of those blood-suckers, it was ! You don't suppose it was one of us, do you? When blackguards" ("canaille" was his word) "like *you* and *me* burst up, they chuck us into a hole. They don't make such a fuss about it as all that !"

And with a malignant scowl he lounged away in the wake of the procession.

Was it this sudden claim of kinship with the vile creature ; this assumption on his part of perfect equality ; was it only because I had never been called "canaille" before, and it takes some time to get accustomed to it? Whatever the cause, a shadow seemed to fall around me ; the scene lost all its charm ; the sky lost all its blue. That day I sketched no more.



## "BOY'S LOVE" AND "OLD MAN."

BY G. B. STUART.

### I.

"**W**HAT I say is," remarked young Biggs of the —th to his crony, Bostock, "when a girl is going on for thirty, and everybody knows it in a place like this, it must be doosed awkward!"

"But she can't be anything like that," said Bostock, who had only joined a short time before, and was not as well up in the ages of the Seamount ladies as his friend. "She may be five-and-twenty, which is hard lines enough for a handsome girl with little White and Blue taking the shine out of her wherever she goes; but she can't be more."

"She's hard on thirty, I tell you. Why, Old Mavor remembers her grown up when White and Blue were in short frocks, and I've heard Fowler and half-a-dozen other men rave about her ever so long ago. Poor old Red! the twins cut her out entirely. I wonder"—reflectively and charitably—"she doesn't emigrate or take to sick nursing or something."

"She won't do that," said Bostock sapiently, longing to have his innings, and yet withholding his information to give it double importance. "She won't do that if Swanny means business, as I'm pretty sure he does. Here she comes, by Jove, down from the hill. And here's Swanny coming across the market square just as if he hadn't been hiding all the afternoon in Piles's shop, pretending to choose a new bridle and waiting to meet her promiscuous, as soon as ever she turned up. Now stay and see some fun!"

Both young gentlemen flattened themselves against the club window in anticipation of a treat, in which they, as well as Lord Alfred Swan, were doomed to be disappointed. For Miss Rose Grantham (familiarily known as "Red," while her sisters, Blanche and Violet, rejoiced in the nicknames of "White" and "Blue," a source of never failing amusement to the gallant —th), without pausing, or looking for more than a second in the young nobleman's direction, gave a very small bow and continued swiftly on her way.

Poor Lord Alfred stood stock still with outstretched hand, the other still grasping his lifted hat. Biggs and Bostock in the club window roared with laughter till the offensive sound was carried through the clear summer air to where their friend stood in the middle of the market square: who, becoming aware that his ruse and its discomfiture had been observed, crammed on his hat defiantly and dashed back into Piles's shop.

"By George, that was a joke! Never saw Swanny so at a loss in his life! Must go down to the tennis-ground and tell the fellows.



If he means business, the girl's on a new tack. You never can tell what they are after, and of course a girl of that age gets as wily as—as a widow."

"New tack!" sneered Bostock, as Biggs took up his racket and went out. "Why, that's the oldest tack of all, if a woman wants to land a fellow, and pretends not to see him and that sort of thing. Why, I've known it myself! Expect they both mean business from that!"

Miss Grantham was something better than a mere garrison hack, though it had been her misfortune to live from her earliest childhood in the *evidence* of a large military and naval station like Seamouth. The young men who laughed at her spinsterhood, and her five and twenty years—she was not older in spite of "Old Mavor" and his recollections—forgot or knew very little about her mother's long illness and death, which made a woman of poor Rose at fifteen; the early trials of housekeeping and hospitality when Colonel Grantham brought home an unexpected party of half-a-dozen guests to dinner without giving his inexperienced little daughter either warning or assistance; the education and care of Blanche and Violet which devolved upon her; and her own gradual shelving from public and private notice as these two young ladies blossomed out into beauties, and became the acknowledged belles of Seamouth.

Colonel Grantham, an easy-going man, with a sufficient income derived from a commissariat appointment, was fond enough of his daughters in his own way. He liked to find them pleasant, popular, always well-dressed; did not object to taking them out to evening parties, nor to making continual little parties at home to amuse them. They would marry, of course, in good time; girls did; but he did not want them to hurry into matrimony with any of the succession of lieutenants, naval and military, who always made the luncheon-table of the villa on the hill so lively. He was not the man to hurry his girls, and he liked to have them all about him, but he would have very little to leave them. Rose's partners, he fancied, had rather fallen off last winter; or those two pussies, the twins, had taken the wind out of her sails; so if Swan were in earnest, Rose had better think of it, and he would ask the young fellow up to dinner that very evening.

Lord Alfred Swan was the third son of the Duke of Poolborough to be sure, and rather a big fish for a Seamouth military family to tackle; but then Colonel Grantham had met His Grace somewhere, and knew him to be a quiet, unassuming gentleman, very much occupied in a scheme for introducing the bread-fruit tree into the west coast of Scotland, where he had some property. His younger sons had their mother's money, and were independent of him, the heir being already settled with a wife and family.

So Lord Alfred's doings were of comparatively small importance to the house of Poolborough. And "Swanny" himself was such a

determined little fellow, so bent on carrying through whatever he undertook, be it hurdle-races, theatricals, military duty or love-making, that it evidently lay in Rose's own hands to become Lady Alfred whenever she chose.

"And I won't have any shilly-shallying at her age," muttered the Colonel. "It's bad for the twins, and won't do in a woman who is not quite in her first bloom.—Hullo! Swan, is that you? Come up and dine with us to-night, will you? Haven't seen you for an age. Seven-thirty—sharp!"

Now we see pretty plainly how matters stood at Seamouth respecting Rose Grantham and her love affair. Public Opinion (represented by Biggs and Bostock) had declared itself. Parental consent was ready and waiting, while Lord Alfred's feelings may be guessed by the exuberant manner in which he accepted Colonel Grantham's impromptu invitation, after the misspent afternoon in Piles's shop.

Rose's own thoughts may not be so easy to come at; for though scarcely "as wily as a widow," to use the elegant simile of the far-sighted Biggs, she had yet learnt sufficient control of face and manners to baffle the crowd of curious onlookers, male and female, whose business it is in such places as Seamouth to see as much as possible of any games that may be going forward.

White and Blue were different. They were all smiles or frowns as the case might be, and as Lieutenant Smith or Captain Thompson deserved. Everyone might see in a moment, by the first shake of their fringy little heads, whether it was to be peace or war for the said gentlemen, whether the party was properly divided, or the cotillon conducted to their satisfaction.

But Rose had acquired something in her twenty-five years' residence in Seamouth which, be it "ease of manner," "want of feeling," or "affected nonchalance," as differently decided by her friends, at all events stood her in good stead when she had anything to keep to herself from Seamouth eyes.

She was suffering intensely now, as she walked, straight, tall, well dressed and self-possessed, across the market square, down some side streets and on to the country road, which, with an occasional glimpse of the sea on the right hand, goes straight into the loveliest and loneliest country in England.

She was not likely to meet anyone she knew, for all her world was at the tennis ground, whither White and Blue, under the charge of a dependable aunt, had driven their ponies an hour ago; and if any carriages met her turning her back on the town, there was always the explanation which she knew so well and had so often listened to so politely, "Of course you don't care so much for that sort of thing as the young girls. My Cecilia, or Kate, or Jane, is so devoted to tennis!"

All this was very bitter for the girl to bear who had known the intoxication of a first place in a very spirited society where men pre-

dominated, and who had gradually felt that place slipping from her; not from any falling off on her own part but because all popularity is short-lived, and the popularity of a military station is the most evanescent of all.

Her face and figure—though, to do her justice, she had hitherto thought very little about them—were not at all impaired by the great age she had attained; even "Old Mavor" and his contemporaries would allow that. She had scrutinised herself very carefully in the glass before coming out, and had come to that conclusion. And as she walked along the silent country road, her soft cream flounces and laces, the black velvet hat and crimson parasol, as dainty and lady-like as usual, she whispered again and again to herself: "I am not so altered but he must know me," with a tightening of the lips and a compression of the eyebrows which many people would have deemed impossible to the impassive Miss Grantham.

It was a relief to get away from the gaiety and bustle of the town into the quiet, sweet-scented country road, where it was possible to drop the mask of ready interest and acquiescence in everything, and look firmly in the face that fear which had stalked grimly behind her for nearly six years, and had now come up with her in all the hopelessness of certainty.

It was six years since Christopher Horton had sailed with his regiment for India; a little later in the year, however, than now, for Rose had been failing and looking pale after her summer's dissipation and the housekeeping anxieties; and Aunt Charlotte had carried her away to Tenby for change, in the St. Luke's summer of a fine October. So it came about that she was not at Seamount to say good-bye to Captain Horton and the Royal Cambrians, who regretted it to a man, for Rose Grantham was in the zenith of her popularity then, and the gallant Cambrians were men of taste. I think they would have agreed that "the service is going to the dogs, sir!" had they seen Rose the subject of jest and comment from such youngsters as Biggs and Bostock. It was well for the latter that the Royal Cambrians and the degenerate—th were not in joint possession of the Seamount Club.

People who wonder at everything, had wondered that the intimacy between Captain Horton and the Granthams had come to nothing. Rose wondered, too, as the days of that October went by at Tenby, and no one ever came to pick up the threads of an interrupted conversation, an incomplete explanation which she knew so well was fraught with life interests for herself and Christopher Horton. By-and-bye came one of her father's unsatisfactory, sketchy letters. "The Cambrians are off to a man. Even Horton, who I thought had quite concluded to accept the two years' home appointment at the dépôt. He dined here with Clarkson and Vyner last night, and was very down in the mouth about leaving England. Sent kind regards, etc., for you. I hope he is not in any stupid scrape; looks

like it, this sudden change of plans. When are you coming home?" The letter concluded—"We all miss you, and shall want your opinion on the new fellows."

And this was the end of it! Rose Grantham at nineteen had still clung to some vague hope of a mistake or a misunderstanding, and had watched many mail steamers into the harbour, with ever fresh expectation of an explanation. But Rose Grantham at twenty-five, with six years' experience of Seamouth to mature her judgment, had scarcely felt surprised when her father had thrown down the homeward mail the evening before, announcing:

"You recollect Horton, of the Cambrians? This must be he. Colonel Horton, Mrs. Horton, three children, and ayah, by the *Syrian Queen*. Nice fellow, he was!"

And now the *Syrian Queen* was disembarking her passengers in Seamouth Harbour, as Rose, who was well up in all the comings and goings of ships, knew; and doubtless, Colonel Horton and his party would drive through the town to the station to catch the afternoon train to London. Perhaps he would even point out the road to the Hill and say to his wife: "That's where some people I knew lived. I used to flirt with the daughter!"

Poor Rose continued to aggravate her misery by touches of this sort; picturing a possible meeting, possible civilities which might have to be exchanged between Christopher Horton's wife and herself should the Colonel return to the depôt of his regiment; possible hospitalities at the Hill insisted on by her father.

The old days, the old walks and talks on the terrace which still bloomed with geranium and lobelia, as it had done in Horton's time, would surely rise up and cry shame to him—just as every familiar object in the Hill garden had spoken of hope to Rose Grantham when first she had known him. There was the sun-dial, a little mossier perhaps, where Rose and Christopher had cut their initials one lazy Sunday afternoon. She had seen the twins, and their usual court of admirers, and little Lord Alfred Swan doing just the same thing a day or two ago, and the scene had come back to her with an almost unbearable pain. Perhaps Colonel Horton would remember it, too, some day when their acquaintance was renewed, and might point it out to his wife as the spot "where Miss Rose and I used to sit and argue, about all things in heaven and earth." Of course, mentally adding: "Before I knew you, my dear."

No, Rose Grantham decided, she could not bear this, though she had learnt to bear a great deal in the last six years. And with this resolve, the natural, the only escape for her presented itself with the rapidity of a lightning flash: marriage with Lord Alfred Swan. "Little Lord Alfred," she and her sisters had always called him, and, however endearing the diminutive may sound from a man to a woman, it has scarcely the same significance when the sexes are reversed. Nevertheless, Lord Alfred had much to recom-

mend him ; and were Rose Grantham to accept him, there would probably be but one dissentient voice uplifted—that of her own heart.

As Rose turned and retraced her steps towards home, she was anxiously weighing all the pros and cons of the case, throwing whatever weight she could into the former scale, and placing her young suitor in every light that was most favourable.

He was a year or so younger than herself, and his extreme youthfulness of appearance and manner had, perhaps, led her into encouraging him at the Hill, and treating him as a pleasant young brother or cousin, and an agreeable swain for the twins. When Lord Alfred had begun to lay siege to Miss Grantham in form, the incorrigible White and Blue had laughed themselves nearly into hysterics of superior, sisterly discrimination, and declared that they had seen how it would be all along. "Swanny" had never cared a scrap about either of them. He was just the sort of boy to fall in love with a grandee like Rose. And Rose must take him, for she had encouraged him from the first; though apparently the dear old goose didn't know much about these things in practice, however ably she could lecture on them theoretically to other people.

Then poor Swanny himself began to change: to shroud himself in supernatural gloom and solemnity whenever he met Rose; to hover in her neighbourhood with such portentous sighs and such studied indifference to the world at large, that even the self-possessed Miss Grantham was made nervous and uncomfortable, and, hazarding a few remarks, intended to be purely friendly or sisterly, found them received with such warmth of appreciation as left her more uncomfortable still.

There was much to like, perhaps for a younger girl to love, in the Duke of Poolborough's son besides his birth and position, which could not fail to tell in a society like that of Seamouth. He was merry, unaffected, and simple as a schoolboy, with a reverential regard for things and people he did not understand, which was irresistibly appalling.

"I don't know anything about that, I'm afraid; by Jove, I wish you'd take me in hand, and teach me a little," he would say plaintively to Rose; and then, perhaps, next day some chance allusion would reveal that he had been wading through the Debates, or looking up some historical reference, in place of falling back on the sporting novels, which had been his highest notion of mental food and exercise until lately.

Rose had rather shirked acknowledging to herself the power which she had established over him, though the signs of it grew every day more and more significant. But now, standing as she did before a shattered idol, in bitterness and humiliation, her young lover's devotion came to her mind as the only pleasant thing left upon the earth that was once all pleasantness. It could scarcely be called unfair to



him if she accepted the bargain which he was only too willing to make. She knew him well enough to be sure that, in offering her his love, he was humble enough to be content with a less ardent feeling on her part. He would willingly take *anything* she had to give; respect, liking, mere acquiescence even. And would not these, from the woman to whom he had given his full and first affection, be as good an exchange as the eager acceptance of his position and name which he would very likely meet with from some other girl were Rose to refuse him? She would, and she was sure she could, satisfy Lord Alfred, whose nature was to give enthusiastically. If she concluded the bargain, no one should have the slightest ground for dissatisfaction except herself, perhaps; for, in a matter of love, no woman is satisfied to give a half measure of affection, any more than to receive it, and can more easily put up with the latter condition than the former.

And as she argued this to and fro in her mind, she came to the open space which lies outside Seamouth town and leads to the station, and standing a moment by the roadway about to cross, there passed her a couple of slow-rolling, shabby Seamouth flies, piled with Indian luggage, deck-chairs, and all the paraphernalia of a journey; while an ayah's piteous face and figure was plainly discernible before Miss Grantham had time to lower the crimson parasol and shut out the commonplace little cavalcade.

"I could never face that," she said convulsively, hurrying on with wide-open eyes that saw nothing. And at that moment the thing was settled, and Rose Grantham mentally accepted Lord Alfred Swan.

## II.

"I DON'T want any more chocolates unless you can find them with almonds in them. I'm tired of cream," Blanche Grantham was saying to Captain Thompson at dessert that evening.

Lord Alfred was dining at the Hill, and Thompson and Bostock had somehow joined the party too, having walked up with the girls from the tennis-ground.

Violet and Bostock were fighting their last "set" over again. It had been a capital meeting, and everyone had so much to say about it that there was no occasion, even for conversational purposes, to ask Rose where she had spent the afternoon. "Swanny" was smiling and incredulously content with Miss Grantham's manner, which was a return to the old, half-patronising, wholly charming interest in him, and his sayings and doings which had existed between them before he began to pose as a seriously-intentioned lover. He wondered whether she could possibly be sorry for the indifferent way in which she had cut him that afternoon; or whether by chance she had come to the knowledge of his painstaking study of Kinglake's "Crimean War,"



the result of a recent argument about modern warfare and politics between Colonel Grantham and his eldest daughter, during which poor "Swanny" had sat dumb and acutely conscious of ignorance; little guessing that the arguments which Rose adduced so cleverly were not the outcome of the "awful stiff reading" with which he credited her, but of similar conversations held years ago with Christopher Horton.

"Swanny" was lost in a maze of pleasant conjecture when his hostess gave the signal to retire, thereby frustrating Captain Thompson's generous intention of transferring all that were left of the chocolate bonbons to Blanche's pocket as soon as Aunt Charlotte's attention, on his other side, should be diverted. Bostock jumped up to throw open the door, with an especial grace and suppressed homage which he had practised, for Violet's subjugation, on his bedroom door in barracks; and the dinner came to an end.

"You might have the coffee put in the garden, my dear," cried Colonel Grantham after Rose. "I must go down and see Seaham for ten minutes at the club by-and-bye, but I shan't be gone half-an-hour. So don't finish it. I may bring him up with me, and then we can have a rubber."

The young men were all sufficiently at home to dispense with their host, and did not keep him long over the wine after this announcement. Each had his own object to further by rejoining the ladies; and the six young people paired off, very much as they had done at dinner, in the long sloping garden, leaving Aunt Charlotte in the verandah with an interminable mess of red knitting, to meditate, perhaps, on the possible advent of Dr. Seaham, an old comrade of the Colonel's.

Was it possible, Lord Alfred was asking himself, as he walked by Rose Grantham's side, that this wonderful, adorable creature was at last within his reach; that the longed-for opportunity was before him, and that he had only to speak? He felt his hands grow cold and his face grow hot at the bare idea, and he plucked nervously at the shrubs as they brushed against him. Far away—for the garden wound and sloped considerably for the grounds of a villa—he could hear the voices of the others. "Play!" and "Love All!" sounded derisively in his ears like cries from some other world; and had an authoritative voice at that moment announced to him that he was neither the Duke of Poolborough's son, nor an officer in Her Majesty's —th Regiment, he would have mildly acquiesced in both statements.

He and Rose were stationary by this time at the end of the long nut-walk which looks across the bay. Rose was very pale, and her hands were tightly twisted together; but when Lord Alfred, with a desperate courage, stood still in front of her and looked in her face for the first time, she gave him an encouraging smile. Her courage for the great resolve was unshaken.

"I did not mean to be rude this afternoon. I think the sun was in my eyes," she began, to break the embarrassing silence. "You are very good not to bear malice!"

She spoke at random to give herself and him time. She knew that the proposal was to come, but she wanted it to be made with all dignity as befitted a son of the Duke of Poolborough; and she liked the lad too well not to desire to do everything in her power to set him at his ease, having all a woman's horror of seeing her lover in a possibly ridiculous position.

"Malice!" echoed Swanny, catching at the word as an opening. "I assure you it was with a very different feeling that I came up here to-night. When I met your father, and he asked me to dinner, I was just in the most miserable state of uncertainty, wondering——"

"What the menu would be at mess, and whether our cook could bear the comparison?" finished Rose; "and eventually you decided to come here and give Martha an opportunity of distinguishing herself."

She was talking nonsense, she knew, but the situation was more trying than she had anticipated. Something in the young man's face, unusually pale and eager, made her suddenly think of him rather than of herself.

"I came here to try and get an opportunity for myself. I thought if you would let me come down into the garden with you ——"

"We might cut the lavender that is all going to seed. I have been meaning to do it for a week, and no one would volunteer to help me. Let us go in and get my garden scissors!"

No, she could not do him this great wrong! Better a hundred times the old Seamouth life with its daily annoyances, the dreams and memories of the Hill garden, which must be regarded henceforward as a childish romance; better, even, the presence of Christopher Horton and his wife, than the lifelong remorse of having sacrificed this generous boy to her pique. A few years hence someone would learn to love him for his own sake. Meanwhile, come what might, her conscience should be clear towards him. Every scent in the summer garden, every herb and flower had its recollections of her early girlhood, which meant its recollections of Chris Horton; but it was not of him nor of herself that she thought as she looked at the bright eyes and the imploring face of the young man before her.

"Rose, won't you give me a moment's hearing? You must know quite well what I have to say ——"

"Forgive me, forgive me! I cannot listen to you," she answered hurriedly, and the poor young suitor looked more perplexed than ever at the fervour with which she asked his pardon. Then gathering all her courage: "I will not pretend to misunderstand you; but

believe me, it will be better for both of us if you will leave what you have to say unsaid. Ah! here are papa and Dr. Seaham" (as two welcome forms loomed through the dim light at the end of the nut-walk): "I must go and see after the coffee."

She passed him quickly, and he was not sorry for the moment's respite in which to recover himself. For, though in after life Swanny used to tell himself and his wife that he had never really proposed to Rose Grantham, at that moment, standing forlorn in the Hill garden, he felt very much as if she had refused him!

It was not Dr. Seaham who followed Colonel Grantham down the garden path to meet Rose. Dr. Seaham was safely seated in the drawing-room, whither Aunt Charlotte had retired before the advance of those night dews which afforded her much alarm and conversation; and he was offering that lady some advice for her neuralgia with an assiduity not strictly professional.

As Rose came up, her father's voice broke the silence which seemed to have brooded upon the Hill garden that evening, and to have filled it with strange possibilities.

"I have brought an old friend home with me—Horton, who used to know you when you were a little girl!" and her hand and Chris Horton's met once again.

After that, for a few moments, she knew nothing of what was going on around her. The girls had come from the tennis-ground, and were laughing and introducing themselves and their companions. Someone noticed Lord Alfred, who stood a little apart.

"You are quite destroying that poor little bush," Violet cried to him; "cutting at it with a stick. It is a little delicate bit of 'boy's love,' which I have taken some pains to make grow, and now you have almost beaten it down!"

Then seeing his woe-begone look, she spoke more kindly.

"Come and make friends with this new man" (a panacea for all troubles in Violet's opinion). "He knew us when we were so high," saucily imitating her father's voice and gesture; "and never mind the 'boy's love'; it is sure to grow all right again."

But Swanny refused to be comforted, and went sadly away to barracks so early in the evening, that if Colonel Grantham's attention had not been diverted by his old friend Horton's coming, he must have noticed it and guessed the reason, as "White" and "Blue" did very speedily.

These young ladies very soon made up their minds about Horton, and pronounced upon him to each other. "Nice looking, just what a colonel should be, but rather too quiet and foggyish. Rose can talk to him," and returned to the society and entertainment of Bostock and Thompson, who, during their temporary eclipse, had been savagely knocking about the tennis balls, and inveighing in dark and mysterious language against old friends who knew people when they were "so high." But the return of the twins, having

weighed their old friend in the balance, and so obviously found him wanting, restored their good humour.

"You know what a colonel is!" Blanche said, in such a confidential way, that they both at once felt the advantage of *not* being field officers.

To Rose, it was all like a dream. On the very spot where, not half an hour before, she had stood with Lord Alfred, and had suddenly faced all the long future which she proposed to live as his wife, Christopher Horton was telling her of the six years of his past life, in the old, well remembered voice, which of itself seemed to annihilate all past sorrow. It was a sad story, and an involved one, though Chris Horton touched as lightly as possible on the brother's extravagance, treachery and ruin which for a time had overshadowed his own life, crippled his resources, and threatened to stain his name with reproach.

"He is dead now," Colonel Horton ended. "I did his last bidding to-day when I made over his wife and children to the care of her relations, who came down to Seamouth to receive her. And then I was free to take up my own life again, and my first impulse was to come here. Rose, do you remember where we broke off, six years ago, when you went away to Tenby, and I first heard of poor Ted's misfortunes, and was obliged to go out with the regiment and see what could be done for him? I heard of you sometimes after that, when fellows came out who had been at Seamouth, but I never could have seen you again unless I had cleared our name from all this miserable business. Thank God that has been done, though it has left me a poor man, and an old man, scarcely a fit mate for such a blooming rose."

But Rose Grantham had no fears on this score; and as she listened to Chris Horton's honest, tender wooing, she was filled with a great thankfulness that she had not succumbed in the hour of temptation; that she could still count her faithfulness worthy of this brave man's love.

By-and-bye, strolling homewards through the dusky summer night, they came to the garden corner where poor Lord Alfred's little shrub lay battered and broken.

Rose knelt down, with a feeling of tenderness she could hardly have explained, and cleared the plant of its snapped branches, setting it firmly in the earth again, and building the soil round its stem.

"What is it?" Horton asked, holding out his hand for a piece.

"'Boy's Love;' we used to call it 'Old Man' when I was at home."

"Oh, Rose, Rose, there's an allegory for you! Are you sure you know what you are accepting?"

But Rose declared she was quite content.

## PEARLS.

BY ALEXANDER H. JAPP, LL.D., F.R.S.E.

IN one of the finest passages in the "Paradise Lost," Milton painted the throne on which Satan sat, "by merit raised to that bad eminence," as outshining the "wealth of Ormuz and of Ind," and described the gorgeous East as with richest hand showering on her kings "barbaric pearl and gold."

What might seem at the first glance somewhat out of keeping, on a more close examination only attests the exactitude of Milton's knowledge. For it might be asked why pearls are here alone associated with gold? Are there not rubies and emeralds, opals and diamonds, and sapphires, and the topaz, the beryl and the chalcidony, and the turquoise, and the onyx, and the jasper, and the carbuncle? These are all more gorgeous than the pearl; and if the marks of barbaric taste are, as is usually assumed, flash of colour, and variety, and radiance, then surely is the pearl the very last of gems to be so chosen out and celebrated.

Barbaric *pearl* and gold!

At first sight the words seem to be contradictory; in the subdued colour and modest purity of the pearl there is nothing of "barbaric gorgeousness." In most regions of the East, however, and particularly in Persia, in ancient times the pearl was ranked the first of all gems; and no end of legend and myth was associated with it. Even in India, which furnishes a partial exception, as putting first the diamond, the Hindoos endowed Vishnu with the special honour of having created pearls; and all their gods are so richly decorated with pearls as to have awakened in the minds of many travellers no little surprise and admiration.

Egyptians, Babylonians and Assyrians, as well as Persians, held them in the highest esteem, and the ancient Mexicans were in no whit behind in their appreciation and reverence. The palace of Montezuma, we read, was studded with pearls and emeralds, and the Aztec kings possessed specimens of pearls of the utmost value, got, as is believed, from the pearl fisheries of Panama.

In the barbaric East, therefore (for India was even in those days hardly barbaric), the pearl took precedence of all other precious stones; and Milton was quite right when he spoke of the gorgeous East, with richest hand showering on her kings "barbaric pearl and gold."

The ancients do not seem to have had any clear conception of the natural process by which pearls are produced, and it is possible enough that they would have rejected it even had it been made known to them. Greeks and Romans, so far as we can ascertain, were

in this no whit in advance of Egyptians, Persians, and Babylonians. Even in the days of Pliny, men's ideas were vague enough on this subject as on many others which science has made plain. One can hardly restrain a smile as one reads these words of Pliny, whom moreover, one could hardly wish to have been deceived, such a pretty poem has he made of it.

"Pearls," says he, "are great or small, better or worse, according to the quantity and quality of the dew they received. For if the dew were pure and clear that went into them then were the pearls fair and orient; if thick and troubled, then the pearls likewise were demure, foul and dullish; whereby, no doubt, it is apparent and plain that they participate more of the air and dew than of the water and sea, for according as the morning is fair so are they clear; otherwise, if it be misty and cloudy they will be misty and thick in colour. Cloudy weather spoiled their colour, lightning stopped their growth, and thunder made the shell-fish miscarry altogether, and eject hollow husks called *Physemata* or bubbles."

To turn from the fancy and romance of the ancients to the sober facts of nature is only to find a truer romance.

The pearl is simply a secretion of the common substance, carbonate of lime, which is drawn in by the oyster from the water, and employed, mixed with some fluid proper to itself, and along with some extremely thin, almost transparent membrane, in forming the lining of its shell.

What is called the mantle of the bivalve is the medium of this secretion. The peculiar nacreous lustre, the soft, shimmering, subdued gleam, is caused by these being laid on alternately in exceedingly thin layers in slow succession; these layers not being absolutely smooth, but having a gentle, almost unnoticeable series of waves or undulations, which are easily detected by scientific instruments, and are invariably present. This is so certain, says a good authority, Mr. Hugh Owen, that "a similar nacreous lustre has been produced on buttons by engraving a steel die with a diamond point in a regular series of undulating lines, and then striking the button as a coin would be struck."

The gem is due either to some wound, which throws off osseous particles, or to some irritating substance, such as a grain of sand finding its way within the shell, against which the oyster fortifies itself by wrapping it round in layer after layer of the same substance as that with which it lines its shell. In the centre of every pearl, it is said by scientific men, there will be found in cutting it some such particle as this.

The creature thus translates the cause of its pain or discomfort into a beautiful object, which has given rise to many fine thoughts and images; and none, perhaps, is finer than that of Jean Paul Richter, the great German romance writer, when he says: "Afflictions and disappointments to the true character are only means to its



beautifying and perfecting, as the oyster, when it is injured, closes the wound with a pearl."

The knowledge of this fact has led to no end of ingenuity in introducing particles of various kinds within the shell of the bivalve. The Chinese perhaps have outstripped all others in this clever device. They introduce minute images of their gods, and grotesque figures of animals, into the open shell of the Chinese mussel, which, after a certain time, are found coated over with the secretion we call mother-of-pearl. They are then withdrawn, and find ready sale; some of them being of considerable value. But though much has been made clear regarding the circumstances of production, there are points still unsettled. The bivalves abound; but they do not equally produce pearls in all localities. The most probable explanation is that the chemical constituents of the water have much to do with it, and, of course, they vary indefinitely—not only in different waters, but in the same waters at different times.

There are several species of bivalves which produce pearls. From that named *unio margaritiferus* we derive our supply in Britain; while the pearl mussel—*meleagrina margaritifera*—is the source of the Oriental supply. Those derived from others are of little or no value, and vary in colour from pinky-purple to rose-colour, some being almost black. The British pearl-producing bivalve is found in some of the mountain streams of England and Wales, and more abundantly in some of the mountain streams of Scotland; but, seeing that out of every hundred bivalves opened there may be found only one pearl, and even that of little value, it may be guessed that pearl-fishing in our country can hardly be a very profitable calling; though it must be said that, owing to a passion for rose-coloured pearls which set in among the ladies of Paris a few years ago, some good has been done to the Scotch pearl fisheries; for pearls of a rose-colour are more frequently found there than elsewhere.

Many and varied, too, are the methods which have been adopted for the securing of these precious gems.

One of the earliest Arab geographers in the ninth century describes the habits of the pearl divers with which he was acquainted. They filled their ears with cotton and oil, and compressed their nostrils with tortoiseshell before they dived: this practice, we believe, continues among the pearl-divers of the Persian Gulf even to the present day.

Sir J. Emerson Tennant, in his interesting description of the pearl fisheries of Ceylon, gives some very instructive details. The diver inserts his foot in a sinking stone and inhales a full breath. He presses his nostrils with his left hand, raises his body as high as he can above the water to gain impetus in the descent, and the stone being at that moment liberated, he sinks rapidly to the bottom. As soon as this is reached, the stone is drawn up; and the diver, having thrown himself on his face, with all alacrity fills his basket. At a

given signal this is drawn up by the cord which is attached to it, and held above by the men in the boat; and the diver assists his ascent by springing on the rope as the basket rises.

The divers remain about fifty-five seconds under water; and accidents are rare. The noise and constant excitement of the water, during the fishing season, is found to be quite sufficient to protect the men from the sharks; and it may be that additional confidence is given to the men by the fact of a shark-charmer being present in each boat!

The shells are taken out and thrown upon the shore, and as soon as the animals are dead, the pearls are easily extracted. The thickest and finest shells are carefully selected from the mass, and are destined to be worked out for mother-of-pearl. The more worthless are left, and groups of the poorer people may be seen turning and turning them over in the hope of finding some stray pearl that may have been overlooked.

Pearls have had their own share in determining the history of the world.

There is no doubt that Julius Cæsar found his main inducement to visit Britain in the reports of great pearls to be found there. He is mentioned to have been seen weighing British pearls in his hand, and comparing them with others from the East a short time before his expedition to our Islands was undertaken. We know that he shared to the full the Roman love of pearls. On his return to Rome from these Islands the breast-plate which he dedicated to the Venus Genetrix was formed from pearls taken from British waters.

We have thus conclusive proof of two things: (1) That Cæsar's main aim was not forgotten in the midst of the warlike and imperial ambitions which in the Romans always mixed with and modified any personal or narrower preference; and (2), that the ancient Britons knew the value of pearls and worked their waters for them, that they traded in them, and that they found their way to distant regions of the earth even at that early period. But pearl fishing was for a long course of centuries in abeyance in our country.

The revival of the pearl fishing in Scotland is of comparatively recent date. In 1761, pearls were sent from Scotland to London to the value of £10,000, and these were mainly taken from the Tay and Isla. And year by year the trade languished until an Edinburgh jeweller of enterprise made the generous offer to purchase all that were brought to him. The highest price given for a single pearl has not, so far as we know, exceeded £60.

Endeavours have been made to imitate pearls, just as endeavours have been made to manufacture diamonds, but not with much success. Nor is this anything new. The Romans and other early nations of Europe endeavoured to unite and file pieces of shell into the form of spherical pearls; but no one of the least skill or judg-

ment was likely to be deceived by them, though as ornaments they no doubt had their claims.

In 1680, Jacquin, a rosary maker of Paris, filled hollow glass beads with the scales of a small river-fish (the bleak), putting them through some process of condensation, and since then the world has been at no loss to procure what superficially passes for beads and pearl-necklaces.

No city in the world, we read, was ever richer in precious pearls than Rome in the time of the Cæsars. Special mention is made of Lollia Pollena, wife of Caius Caligula. "I have seen her," says Pliny, "so bedecked with emeralds and pearls disposed in rows, ranks and courses, one by another, round about the attire of her head, her cowl, her peruke of hair, her band grace and chaplet, hanging at her ears, round her neck as an ornament in a carcanet, upon her wrists as bracelets, and on her fingers in rings, that she glittered and shone like the sun as she went." The habit was so common of using pearls as a base to throw up the brilliance of other gems, that we may, perhaps, believe even in Caligula's slippers of pearls, with rubies and emeralds set upon them like flowers.

The Roman ladies had a special favour for pearls as ear-rings, and it was one of their consuming ambitions to possess exceptionally fine specimens for this purpose. They preferred the pear-shaped pearls, and often wore two or three of them strung together. They jingled gently as they moved about, fitting accompaniment, it may be said, to their graceful movements, and from this jingling they got their name, which was *crotalia*, or "rattles."

And the taste of the Roman ladies for pearls has perpetuated itself, though other of the ancient luxurious habits, which in their case accompanied it, have long died out. The women of Florence even now are not contented if they do not possess a necklet of pearls, and this generally forms the marriage portion of the middle-class women. It is thought, just as it was in ancient Rome, that this gives an air of respectability, and forms a sure protection from insult in the streets or elsewhere.

Pearls are only twice mentioned in the authorised version of the Old Testament, and both times it is used as a symbol of wisdom.

Some critics have held that the Hebrew word did not exactly mean pearl, but since there can be no doubt that our Saviour referred to the true pearl when he spoke of the "pearl of great price," we may the more implicitly accept it, and gather from the use of the pearl as a figure by the Jewish writers that a perfect pearl has been rare in all ages, and considered of the greatest value.

As may be presumed, from what we have just said, the Romans classed first among pearls those which were pear-shaped, and gave to them the name of *unio*, or unique, a name now in our scientific terminology attached with fitness, as we have seen, to the species of mollusc from which some of the most perfect pearls are obtained.

"To be perfect," says Mr. Emmanuel in his valuable work on gems, "a pearl must be of perfectly pure white colour; it must be perfectly round or drop-shaped; it must be slightly transparent; it must be free from spots or blemish; and it must possess the lustre characteristic of the gem."

At the breaking up of the crown-treasury of France in 1791, a magnificent large spherical pearl, unbored, was sold for £8,000; and two pear-shaped ones, which each weighed 214 grains, were valued at £12,000. Another famous pearl of history was that sold to Philip the Fourth of Spain in 1625. It is said that the Shah of Persia is the happy possessor of a pearl valued at £60,000—a goodly estate in small compass, light and portable—and the Imam of Muscat one for which he has been offered £30,000.

The second division in the Roman classification of pearls was "*Margarites*," which included pearls of any shape or colour, large and mis-shapen often, but often, too, of exceptional purity and beauty. The jewellers of the Cinque-Cento period, with the fertile ingenuity that distinguished them, gave a new value to these eccentric specimens by mounting them in styles as eccentric. Mermaids and sea-monsters were favourite designs; and some illustrations of this treatment are to be seen in collections in this country, notably in the Devonshire Cabinet.

Unlike most gems, the pearl comes to us fresh, pure, lustrous, direct from the hand of nature. Other precious stones undergo much careful labour at the hands of the lapidary, and sometimes owe much to his art. Diamond-cutting is indeed a branch of art, and cameo-carving is a yet higher one. But the pearl owes nothing to man.

This perhaps has a good deal to do with the sentiments we cherish toward it. It touches us with the same sense of simplicity and truth as the mountain daisy or the wild rose. It is absolutely a gift of nature's own. When we turn from the brilliant, dazzling coronet of diamonds or emeralds to a necklace of pearls, there is a sense of relief, of soft refreshment. The eye rests on it with quiet, satisfied repose. It seems so truly to typify steady and abiding affection, which needs no accessory or adornment to make it more attractive.

But pearls, despite all this, are not free from the fluctuations of fashion and caprice which assail all such commodities.

We have seen how for some years the Scottish fisheries have been affected by the craving for rose-coloured pearls among the ladies of Paris. And different people in this, as in so many other things, display varying tastes and tendencies. The Chinese prefer those of a yellow tint—a dark gold colour—as one describes it. This tint is peculiar to certain classes of Oriental pearls. Those found in Panama, California and the South Pacific are more or less dark-looking.

Pearls are pre-eminently children of the light. Not only do they reflect it, but, like flowers, they lose their purity and delicacy of

colour if light is for any lengthened period withdrawn from them. So say they who have had most experience of pearls; and the fact adds a new association and poetic suggestiveness, as it were, affording another very beautiful hint of distinction between them and other gems of purely mineral origin. Those who possess fine pearls had better not forget this, and keep them too long immured in dark and secret corners, however safe. Pearls, we may say, were created to diffuse gentle pleasure, to delight the eye, as they shine simple and translucent.

We have all heard of that draught in which it was said that Cleopatra dissolved her famous pearl, and which she drank at that memorable supper. But science gives the lie to the possibility. No acid the human stomach could receive would be sufficient to dissolve a pearl, and even with the acids of the greatest strength the outer coatings are alone discoloured or destroyed, and this only after a considerable lapse of time. As has been suggested by a very good authority on gems—Mr. King—it is likely that Cleopatra swallowed the solid gem, or found some other means of eluding the vigilance of Antony and those who were with him. Some cynics would say that woman's wiles were quite equal to that enterprise or deception.

References to pearls by great writers, ancient and modern, are very plentiful, as the beauty and purity of the gem would lead one to expect.

We have referred to some of the expressions of Scripture; and we have seen how Pliny viewed the matter, giving in compact version the very unfounded theory of the Romans as to the origin and growth of the pearl. Now that science has taught us better, literature has only found in it, as is invariably the case, a wider field of illustration and imagery. The very associations inseparably linked with the name Margaret, which is only an adaptation of the Greek for pearl, might themselves be cited here. We think of one named Margaret as pure, guileless, untouched with the *finesse* of society, as unspotted by its vices. Something of this Goethe may have had in his mind when he named the heroine of "Faust" Gretchen or Margaret.

Wordsworth, too, makes one of the most touching episodes in the "Excursion" to circle round an ill-fated but noble Margaret. Tennyson, in what is, perhaps, the very finest of his elaborate cabinet of female portraits, painted when he was still a young man, has given us "Rare, pale Margaret," and this is, perhaps, the finest of them all. Othello, in his last touching speech, speaks of himself as

"One, whose hand,  
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe."

To him Desdemona was Margaret—a pearl. He could not otherwise have so truly and concisely expressed himself.

Herrick is not to be outdone by any in his own line. In the midst of his quaint conceits about Julia, he has this verse:—

"Some asked how Pearls did grow and where?  
Then spoke I to my Girl  
To part her lips, and showed them there  
The quarelets of Pearl."

The old fable of pearls being generated by contact with rice, and actually revived not long ago, is only a monstrous imposture. Mr. Hugh Owen has thus disposed of it:—

"The so-called rice is a marine shell of the genus *cyprea*, the end or apex of each example carefully filed or ground off to represent the effect of having been fed upon by the pearls. The whole is a deliberate and barefaced imposture, and it is to be hoped that when some generations hence this miserable myth again crops up in the repetitive operations of history, some more powerful pen than mine may find employment in denouncing the shameless attempt to impose upon the credulity of the scientific world."

Hypocrisy was said by the witty Frenchman to be the tribute vice pays to virtue. Such imitations and impostures are the respect which Fraud pays to Nature's unsullied Beauty.





## A DOCTOR'S STORY.

CROFT HOUSE, at the end of the village, that had stood vacant so long, was let at last. A ladder leaned against the wall; a painter was painting the shutters, a gardener digging in the garden.

Day by day the aspect of the place improved. Soft muslin shades shrouded the windows, flowers bloomed where only weeds had grown; the garden paths were laid with gravel. One night a travelling carriage was driven rapidly through the village and in at the gate leading to Croft House.

Whence came the vehicle? Who its occupants? No one knew, but everyone desired to know. Nothing that took place within that dwelling transpired outside. In passing by, one saw only that the standard roses flourished and that the grass grew greener. What comments were made on the mysterious and invisible inhabitants! What strange tales circulated!

I, the village doctor, concerned myself little enough about the matter. The occupants of Croft House were no doubt human beings, and as such must suffer some of the ills that flesh is heir to; in that case my services would be required. I waited patiently.

A week went by; and one morning before I set off on my rounds, a messenger arrived requesting me to call on Mr. Wilton of Croft House. Dressing myself with more than ordinary care, I crossed the village green. I was young, and felt important.

I was shown into the drawing-room. It was gay with summer flowers, redolent of their perfume. On a couch lay a young girl, in appearance almost a child. She was pale, delicate looking, and very lovely. In front of her knelt a young man of two or three and twenty—one of the handsomest young fellows I had ever seen. He held the hands of the beautiful girl, and they were looking into each other's eyes. As I approached he rose, bowed, and welcomed me with an easy grace that won my heart.

"I confess I expected to find the village doctor an older man," he said with a frank smile as he offered me his hand. "It is for my wife I desired your attendance," he continued, looking at her with the deepest affection. "Una is not strong."

Then at a sign from him, I sat down beside the couch of my interesting patient.

"You are very young, Mrs. Wilton," I remarked. It was certainly rather a leading question.

"I am seventeen, doctor," she answered simply. "We have been married only a few months. We are strangers here, and wish to be so. Oh, Charlie, please explain," she asked, turning to her husband with a faint blush. "You can do it better far than I."

He bent over her, kissed her on the forehead, then straightening himself and looking at me, said: "In attending my wife, Dr. Gray, I must ask you to undertake a double duty. We have decided to tell you our secret—in part—so that while *we* are your patients, I trust we may look upon *you* as our friend—one who will assist us in keeping our secret and in living the entirely secluded life we desire to lead here. Wilton is an assumed name. My father refused to acknowledge my marriage with the girl I love. *Her* father withheld his consent to his daughter marrying into a family too proud to receive her. We would have waited any reasonable time; but, when our parents sought to separate us entirely, we took our lives into our own hands. We married, and hope—in time—to be forgiven."

They had both spoken to me with the candour of youth, of love, and of inexperience. It takes very little sometimes to bring a doctor into close relations with his patients. I seemed to become the friend of this interesting young couple at once. I assured them they need not fear being intruded upon by the villagers, and the only gentlemen's residences within calling distance were tenantless at that season of the year, the owners either being up in London or travelling abroad. As to the vicar, he was a man whose advanced age and infirmities effectually precluded him from visiting more than was absolutely necessary among his parishioners.

"If you go to the church—a mile from here," said I, "he may or may not call upon you. If you do not go, I think I may safely say he will not consider it necessary. In that case you will probably never meet."

Mr. and Mrs. Wilton thanked me warmly, pressing me to come to see them frequently, which I did with ever-increasing pleasure as the beautiful romance of these two loving hearts unfolded itself. I soon discovered that Mr. Wilton had received a college education; I also gleaned that "Una" was somewhat his inferior in social position, and that since their runaway marriage they had been travelling abroad. It was no business of mine to know more than they chose to tell. I respected their secret, and asked no questions.

One morning—my visits had become almost daily now—I saw at once that there was something wrong with Mrs. Wilton, and she saw also that I perceived it.

"You need not feel my pulse, doctor; it is my heart," she said in answer to my looks. "You will think me foolishly weak, I know," she added, forcing a smile, "but I am miserable because my husband is going to leave me."

"Leave you! For how long?" I inquired anxiously.

She blushed, and, looking down, answered shyly: "Till this evening. Ah, don't laugh," she implored; "we have never been separated for so long since we were married. I am nervous and fanciful, I suppose, but I scarcely slept last night for thinking of it, and when I did, a dreadful dream kept repeating itself——"

"Oh, you must not mind dreams," I answered.

"I never did much before, but this—ah, Charlie!" she cried, as Mr. Wilton came in booted and spurred, "I will come and see you mount."

I saw the parting from the drawing-room window where I stood—saw her husband place his hands on either side of the sweet face, and gaze down into it with a look of unutterable love; saw their lips meet together for a moment; after that he kissed her forehead and her beautiful fair hair, then sprang into the saddle, and rode off swiftly as though he could not trust himself to linger longer. At the gate, turning, he waved a last farewell.

She came into the drawing-room presently.

"Doctor, excuse me. I think I will lie down," she said, her large blue eyes looking peculiarly plaintive, brimming as they were with tears. My presence was not needed then. I bowed and took my leave.

But the evening of that day I was sent for to Croft House.

"He has not returned," were the first words spoken by Mrs. Wilton, as I entered the drawing-room. "And, oh! what a day it has been," she continued feverishly; "so long, so sad! I seem to have lived a cruel lifetime in each hour."

"But it is not late. You said Mr. Wilton would not return till evening," I urged.

"It has been evening a long time now. See, the sun is setting. Then it will be night." She shuddered.

I sat with her an hour, perhaps, trying in vain to distract her thoughts. And I too—knowing not how or why—became uneasy. She told me her husband had gone to D——, the nearest town, for letters he expected to find at the post-office. I knew that I could have ridden there and back easily in the time. Still, a thousand simple causes might have delayed him. I begged her to take courage, suggesting she would probably laugh to-morrow at the fears she had entertained to-day. But she shook her head.

"I suffer too much ever to laugh at such feelings as these," she said in a half-whisper. "I do not wish to think it, but it is as though I *knew* something dreadful was —— Oh, I cannot, I dare not clothe the terrible thought in words. That would make it seem so real—so almost certain. Dr. Gray, can this be the punishment for my disobedience—*come so soon?*" she asked in awestruck tones.

I could not answer her, but proposed that she should wrap a mantle round her and come with me into the garden to watch for her husband. She thanked me gratefully, and I carried a basket seat out for her and placed it on the lawn.

Sitting with her hands clasped about her knees—paler, more fragile, more childish looking than I had ever seen her—of a sudden I felt, rather than saw, that a change had come to her. She bent forward as though listening intently, and at the same moment a

distant sound struck on my ear—the galloping of a horse on the high road.

Was there ever before on human countenance such a beatified expression as that which dawned and deepened on Mrs. Wilton's as the sound approached? It was close to us now, but the trees in the garden hid the road from our view. Without slackening speed the horse galloped in at the open gate.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie! Oh, thank God!" cried the girl, in what seemed a wild, ungovernable ecstasy of gratitude and joy. But I pulled her back or the horse would have been upon her.

Then I saw that the animal was riderless, covered with dust and foam; that the bridle hung loose, dragging on the gravel.

A groom who had been on the watch came out. In another moment all the household were assembled on the lawn.

Mrs. Wilton had fallen back, as I thought fainting, in my arms. But no, her senses had not forsaken her. She raised herself and pointed in the direction the horse had come.

"He lies there, there!" she cried, and pushing me from her, ran forward towards the gate. I bade the servants bring lanterns and follow me. To Mrs. Wilton, who was out in the road by this time, I said all I could say to dissuade her from going with me; but my words fell on deaf ears. Feeling it was useless—in one sense cruel—to persist, I compelled her to take my arm. Endowed for the time, by excitement, with almost superhuman strength, she seemed to drag me forward rather than to lean on me. After proceeding about a mile, we came to a bit of level road which for some distance in front showed clear and distinct in the moonlight. Here, I felt certain, we had lost all trace of the horse's shoe marks, which hitherto had been every now and again perceptible in the dusty highway.

"There is a shorter cut—if he knew of it," I said, and stopped.

"Then if there is he would come by it—he would be sure to find out and come by it," she cried.

And I led her back a little distance to a gate at the entrance of a wood, where sure enough were traces sufficient to show we were again on the right track. Servants with lanterns had overtaken us by this time; so, calling out at intervals and listening in vain for a response, we entered the dark wood. Through it was an almost unfrequented bridle path, considered somewhat unsafe by day but particularly so at night; the gnarled roots of trees forming a raised network upon the ground. It was with considerable difficulty we made our way. Mrs. Wilton stumbled many times, would have fallen but for my support. At last she loosed my arm and ran forward, signing me not to follow her. In another moment the wood resounded with a wild and piercing cry. She had seen what the rest of us had failed to see, and when I came up to her she was kneeling beside her husband, her arms clasped about his neck, her face close pressed to his. One agonised

look she gave me as I bent over them : " My dream ! " she said. I understood.

There was an ugly wound on the back of poor Charlie Wilton's head ; the body was still warm, but the heart had ceased to beat. Though Mrs. Wilton did not speak again, she never completely lost her senses, but her mind seemed stunned. We put some hurdles together and carried him back thus to Croft House.

An inquest was held, every particular of which was minutely reported in the county newspaper, to appear in condensed form in most of the journals of the day. But no friends of the dead man ever came forward, nor was it satisfactorily proved whether his death had been the result of violence or of an accidental fall from his horse in the dangerous pathway through the wood.

The post office officials at D—— perfectly remembered the deceased calling for letters on the day in question, giving the name of Wilton ; but there were none for him. In the bank was lodged to his credit some five or six thousand pounds.

I took upon myself the arrangements for the funeral as of everything else. Mrs. Wilton's mind had not sufficiently recovered from the shock it had received on that terrible night to understand or care for what went on around her. Only once—when I urged writing to her friends—did she even momentarily rouse herself to answer me. " My father will never forgive me," she said. " I acted in defiance of his commands. No, I cannot write to him." Then she added : " He has married again," which perhaps in part explained.

A month later a baby was born—a boy whom she called Charlie—and when she spoke the name, tears sprang to her eyes for the first time. It was not until I saw those tears that I had the slightest hope of her mind rallying from the shock ; but then I knew that the living child would save her. She looked upon him as having been sent direct from heaven to solace her for her loss. She regarded him as an emanation from the departed spirit of her husband. There was certainly something uncommon about the child. He was pretty, but not engaging. He never cried ; but it may also be said, he never smiled. He did not suffer, but there was about him none of the joyousness of childhood. It seemed as though the thunder-cloud that had burst over the mother's head had left its shadow on the child.

Between two and three years after Mr. Wilton's death a change seemed likely to occur in my own prospects. A rich relation—a physician of high standing—wrote urging me to come to London immediately, on a matter, so he said, of the greatest importance to myself. There was nothing to prevent my complying with his request. The village was in a healthy state ; my outside practice might be made to spare me. I wrote stating I would be with him on the following day.

I went to Croft House to say good-bye. It was summer. Mrs.

Wilton was sitting out on the lawn with Charlie on a rug close at her feet. She made room for me beside her, and we talked together for a short time of her affairs and of the child. It was not until I had risen to go that I broached the subject of my departure. She looked surprised, alarmed.

"But, Charlie," she said; "if he should be ill?"

"I would not go if he were ill. I will return at once if he should need me," I answered earnestly. "But is he not the picture of health? Why, he seems exempt from every childish trouble."

I told her my relative's address, knowing she only cared to have it in case she needed me for her boy; then I lifted the child in my arms and kissed him. "Good-bye, little man!" I said cheerfully. He was a splendid little fellow, of whom his mother might well be proud; he resembled his father, too, and was growing more like him every day.

I was about to set the child down, but something—some feeling I cannot define—impelled me to hold him closer; to look into his face—his eyes—more scrutinisingly than I had ever done. And so looking, I shuddered at the thought that then assailed me. Great powers! Could fate be so cruel? Had heaven no pity for this poor mother who, so young, had already surely borne enough of sorrow? I put the boy down quickly and turned away.

Perhaps—perhaps after all I may have been mistaken!

I reached London, and Dr. B——'s residence that evening, and my worthy relative quickly explained the object of his summons. He wished me to undertake, with his supervision, a case requiring the utmost care and consideration; one which rendered it necessary that a medical man should reside for a time beneath the same roof as his patient, and be with him night and day.

This patient was Lord Welbury, a self-made man so far as his immense wealth was concerned; but he came of an ancient and honourable race.

I accepted the munificent conditions offered, and within a couple of hours of my arrival in town was driven to Lord Welbury's house in Belgravia, and entered upon the duties of my post.

For some days and nights my responsibilities absorbed all my attention. The life of the sick man hung on a thread, my medical capacity was taxed to its utmost; I knew not, nor cared I, for the time being, what went on outside that chamber.

The crisis passed, my patient began rapidly to recover. The first day that he was able to sit up in his room he asked me a startling question. He said: "Doctor, am I sane?"

"Your mind has never been affected," I answered unhesitatingly.

"Your lordship is as sane as I am."

"Good. Therefore a will made by me now could not be invalid?"

"Most certainly not on the ground of incompetency."

"Then my will must be made to-morrow or next day at latest.



This illness has warned me to delay no longer. My niece's child will be my heir."

His words set me musing and turning over in my mind how this could be.

"Your lordship is childless, then?" The remark slipped from me almost unawares; but they were fateful words, as the result proved. "I beg your pardon," I added, seeing surprise and some annoyance written on his face.

"Not at all," he answered courteously. "I suppose you are acquainted with my family affairs, for they are no secret. I *have* a son, though no communication has passed between us for nearly four years. He set me and my wishes at defiance by marrying beneath him, consequently will inherit little more than an empty title. I mean to leave my fortune to my niece's child. The boy was committed to my care when his parents went to India, two years ago. He is a fine little fellow, and it shows how close in attendance you have been on me if you did not even know he was in the house——"

"Was your son's name Charles—that of the girl he married Una?" I asked, scarcely heeding his last words. My heart was beating faster than it should, my voice in my earnestness less steady than it ought to be.

"Yes. But why these questions?"

I knew he was well enough now to hear the truth, therefore I answered: "Because it is my belief your lordship's son is dead. I will relate to you a sad story; when I have finished you will be able to judge whether or not you are concerned in it." Then I told, as briefly as I could, the Croft House tragedy; and as I did so, read in the ever-increasing interest with which he listened to my tale that my suspicions were correct.

That the man I had to deal with was of a proud, egotistical, unsympathetic nature I was well aware; that the death of his only son would not vitally affect him I had rightly guessed; but I was scarcely prepared for the interest he displayed on learning of the existence of his grandchild. The better nature of the man seemed touched. I spoke of little Charles's beauty, his likeness to his father, even hinted at a resemblance to Lord Welbury himself. With the feverish impatience of an invalid he demanded that the boy should be sent for at once.

"He cannot come without his mother. The two lives are bound together as one."

"Then write to the mother and bid her bring him," was the imperious reply. And the speaker turned his face away as though to intimate no more was to be said. The affair was settled.

On quitting the room I encountered a nurse leading a smiling, rosy little urchin, clad in velvet and rich lace.

"Speak prettily to the kind doctor, Georgie," said the nurse. "This is the little heir, sir," she whispered to me.

Three days later Mrs. Wilton—I must still call her so—and her son arrived. I met them at the station and took them in one of his lordship's carriages to the house. The boy, exhausted apparently by the journey, was asleep when he entered it; he was still sleeping when his mother carried him across the threshold of Lord Welbury's door.

His lordship's reception of her was not ungracious. Could he fail to feel touched at sight of this gentle, beautiful young creature, who had loved his son so well! But it was evident he resented the fact that his grandson, whom he had specially desired to welcome, could not be prevailed upon to notice him, or enticed to leave his mother's arms.

"Excuse him. He is *so* tired," pleaded the young mother, reading the disappointment on her father-in-law's face.

"Well, well. Off to bed with him, then. Bring him to me bright and smiling in the morning."

Bright and smiling! Somehow the words struck me—even haunted me—they were so totally inapplicable to Charlie. I tried to remember if I had ever seen a smile upon that grave baby-face, but tried in vain.

When I entered Lord Welbury's room next day—my presence there at nights was now dispensed with—the old man, in dressing-gown and slippers, was reclining in an easy chair. In front of him stood Mrs. Wilton, with Charlie clinging to her long black draperies.

"Come here, Gray," exclaimed his lordship, irritably. "I cannot get my grandson to notice me. What is to be done?"

"Charlie is shy. He has been used to no one but me," murmured the mother, raising her eyes with an appealing look in them to mine.

"Madam, I fear you are spoiling him," said Lord Welbury sharply. "The other child took to me at once, but this——"

"Send for the other, sir," I suggested, and presently "the little heir," with whom I had previously made acquaintance, was brought in by his nurse. The latter sat down in a far corner with some knitting. The child—as apparently he had been accustomed to do—ran to the old man and scrambled at his knee. "I love 'ou, I love 'ou," he cried.

Lord Welbury's face was radiant.

"Now, Charlie, my man," said he, as the other child after his affectionate greeting scampered off to play beside his nurse.

Charlie was placed on his grandfather's knee.

"Say 'I love you,'" whispered Mrs. Wilton, as she tried to clasp her own child's arms about Lord Welbury's neck.

"Say I love 'ou," echoed the boy mechanically; then drooped his head and lay quite placidly as though he slept.

"Ha, ha, the young rascal! He's making himself at home at last," observed Lord Welbury, well pleased. "And now that I come

to see him more closely, he's not unlike what his father was at the same age, only quieter. Do you know he almost strikes me as being a little dull. Have you found him so, madam?"

"I have been too sad a companion for him, sir. I know—I feel it *now*," sighed the poor mother, her eyes wandering from her own boy to follow the antics of the other, who astride a stick, was careering merrily about the room.

"That can be soon remedied," said Lord Welbury, putting Charlie off his knee; "let the two youngsters romp together. I warrant they'll make friends if let alone."

And in order to try the experiment, we three sat apart and kept up some desultory talk. This lasted but a short time, however. It was broken in upon by a startled cry from the younger boy, Georgie, who, apparently terror stricken, rushed across the room.

"Naughty boy, naughty boy! Send him away. He's making faces at me," cried the spoilt child in an outburst of passion, pointing with outstretched finger at his little companion.

The nurse dropped her knitting, and rose instantly. "I have seen it from the first," she said, calmly confronting us. "The child is half an idiot, my lord."

All eyes were turned as poor Charlie, who stood among some broken toys, his features distorted into the ghastly semblance of a smile.

Mrs. Wilton, running to her boy, shielded him with her arms. "My darling, my darling! Has God no pity?" she cried, and bore him from the room. She had prayed day and night—this unhappy mother—to see either a smile on her baby's lips or a tear in his eye, and hitherto her prayer had been denied. It was granted now. The poor dulled senses of the child, roused into something like activity by the antics of his little lively playfellow, had caused the lips to smile. But what a smile!

Lord Welbury turned pale. A look of disgust, not unmixed with anger, settled on his face.

"There is no doubt the boy is imbecile," he said, as I was about to follow Mrs. Wilton from the room. "Dr. Gray, were you aware of this when you allowed him to be brought here?"

"I was not aware of it," I replied readily. For the sad foreboding that first assailed me on the lawn at Croft House had received no confirmation hitherto. "But even if the case is as we fear," I added earnestly, "it may be curable."

"Excuse me, doctor," he interrupted. "No man who has seen that child as we have seen him can have the slightest doubt but that he is an idiot for life."

"On the contrary, my lord, we must regard the matter from another point. Remember the shadow that rested on his mother before his birth. Where there is no hereditary taint——"

"What then? On the mere chance of the child being curable,

do you suppose I am going to leave my money to him? No!" he cried excitedly. "My own life is too precarious for me to delay longer the settling of my affairs. My niece's child is still my heir. I regard the other as *non est*. For heaven's sake don't let me have my feelings harrowed by the sight of that poor idiot any more. The mother shall have a handsome annuity. I pity her."

And that day Lord Welbury made his will, leaving his immense fortune as he had said.

Once more I returned to my country practice; Mrs. Wilton and Charlie to Croft House.

Never was grief grander in its simplicity, or more nobly borne than that of Mrs. Wilton. She still prayed—prayed with the faith which we are told will move mountains. Her eyes, when not raised to heaven, were bent on her child, ever seeking for the dawning of that intelligence which she believed must come in answer to her prayers. She tried to teach him his childish lessons; she read, she talked to him; even chanted in a low, sad voice the nursery rhymes that happy mothers sing.

At last, one day, exercising over herself a supreme control, she told her son the story of his father's death, told it in simple, child-like language, but with a pathos that might have moved a heart of stone.

The boy was standing at her knee, she holding his unresponsive hand. But, as she proceeded with her narration, he pressed gradually closer to her side. With a thrill of rapture she looked at the drooped eyelids, hoping, praying to see a tear glisten on the dark curled lashes. Trembling, she reached the climax of her sad tale, and bending over him:

"Charlie," she whispered, "Charlie, he was *dead*! you understand?"

Alas, she knew then, even ere she had done speaking that the boy was incapable of understanding her. His eyes were closed. He slept!

And he seemed for ever thus. Whether the beautiful but expressionless eyes were open or closed his mental faculties were in that dulled, dormant state, it might be said they slept.

"He is like that little statue of Jesus now," she once said to me, pointing to a marble figure of Christ, "but some day God will awaken his soul. Ah, doctor, shall I live to see that day?"

I scarcely thought she could, but did not tell her so.

From the day on which she related the story of her husband's death, she herself drooped visibly.

But grief kills very slowly. Five years passed by. Lord Welbury was dead. His wealth—with the exception of the annuity to his son's widow—was left to his niece's child; his title now by right became his grandson's.

The boy grew fast; he was eight years old, but his mind still slumbered. He knew the sound of his mother's voice, would come

to the side of her couch when called ; would lie for hours folded in her arms, whispering back her loving words, repeating her gentle admonitions like an echo. The words apparently conveyed no meaning, but they touched some hidden chord.

Weaker and weaker grew Mrs. Wilton.

On one of my daily visits the sick nurse, who was in constant attendance now, whispered to me that the end was near. I was startled, shocked, to perceive *how* near !

"Doctor, dear friend," she gasped very faintly, as I pressed her poor transparent hand ; but her whole attention was riveted on her son ; she was gazing at him with eyes out of which the light of earth was fading fast. It was evident she desired to say something, but it was some time before the words would come. At last, gathering strength, she said in a low, penetrating voice that scarcely faltered : "I am going to leave you, Charlie. *Here* I could not help you, but when in heaven I see our dear Lord face to face—when on my knees before the great white throne——"

For an instant an expression of rapture irradiated her features ; the next, with a slight sigh she sank back upon the pillow.

I touched Charlie on the shoulder. He dropped upon his knees and, unprompted, joined his trembling hands in prayer. His gaze was directed upward. His countenance assumed a look of intensity I had never seen on it before. Quite suddenly he rose, and flinging himself sobbing across the bed : "Oh, mother, mother ! Do not leave me all alone," he cried.

"See ! Your son is saved !" I whispered, bending over Mrs. Wilton. But I was speaking to the dead.

And yet, even as I looked upon the still white face, the lips seemed parting into a smile of the most holy, calm, ineffable content. Could it be as she herself had said ? Was she already kneeling before the great white throne—had God listened to her prayer at last ?

A few more words and this "o'er true tale" is ended.

From the moment of his mother's death, the mists that had obscured poor Charlie's mind dispersed.

I took him to live with me, and watched his young intelligence grow day by day to healthy vigour. Not even a shadowy semblance of a cloud rests now upon his mind. He has succeeded to his grandfather's wealth as well as to the title, for "the niece's child" is dead.

The present Lord Welbury ranks amongst England's noblest sons—he is one of the greatest philanthropists of the day.

E. M. DAVY.

## A D E F E N C E .

A SINGER sings of Rights and Wrongs—  
 Of world's ideals vast and bright,  
 And feels the impotence of songs  
 To scourge the Wrong or help the Right,  
 And inly writhes to feel how vain  
 Are songs as weapons for his fight;  
 And so he turns to love again  
 And sings of love for heart's delight.

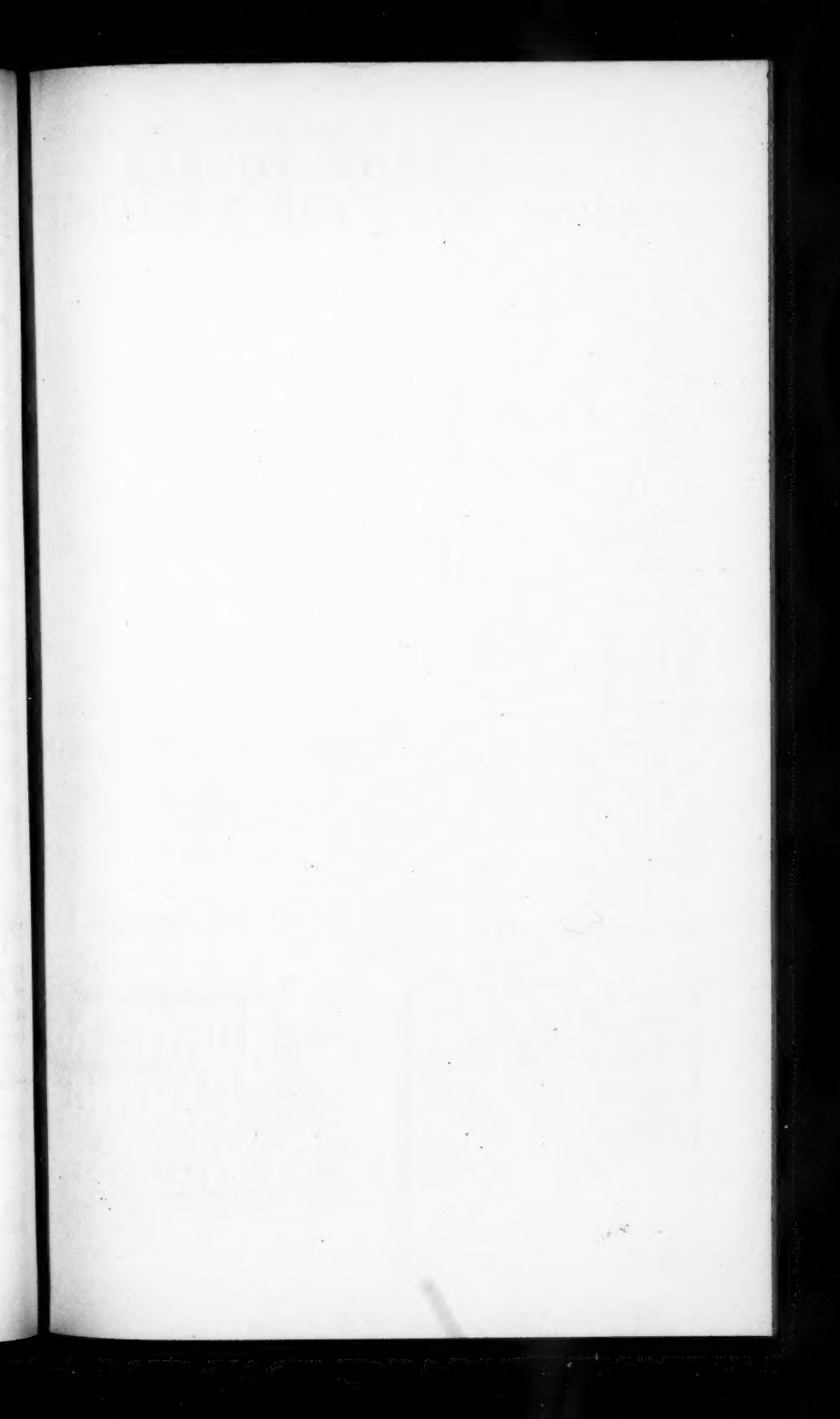
For heart's delight the singers bind  
 The wreath of roses round the head,  
 And will not loose it lest they find  
 Time victor, and the roses dead.  
 Man can but sing of what he knows—  
 "I saw the roses fresh and red!"  
 And so they sing the deathless rose  
 With withered roses garlanded.

And some within their bosom hide  
 Their rose of love still fresh and fair,  
 And walk in silence, satisfied  
 To keep its folded fragrance rare.  
 And some—who bear a flag unfurled—  
 Wreathe with their rose the flag they bear,  
 And sing their banner for the world,  
 And, for their heart, the roses there.

Yet thus much choice in singing is:  
 We sing the good—the true—the just,  
 Passionate duty turned to bliss,  
 And honour growing out of trust;  
 Freedom we sing, and would not lose  
 Her lightest footprint in life's dust.  
 We sing of her because we choose—  
 We sing of love because we must!

E. NESBIT.







M. ELLEN STAPLES.

J. SWAIN

"CHARLEY, SUCH A CURIOUS THING HAPPENED THIS MORNING."

TR  
  
SO  
I  
heart  
now  
more  
"  
kitch  
rattle  
I cou  
for I  
then  
sir, te  
he wa  
in the  
waitin  
try an  
others  
he wa  
praying  
"A  
"Y  
misery  
came  
'What  
had pr  
remem  
went t  
VOL